

**SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HAITIAN PROTESTANTISM IN THE COMMUNITY
OF EAST FLATBUSH, NEW YORK**

BY

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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

HAITIAN PROTESTANTISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE COMMUNITY OF FLATBUSH, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK BY JEAN MECENE JOSEPH

Haitian Protestantism and social justice are two concepts that are at odds traditionally. The challenge of this project was to bridge the schism between the material and the spiritual life. Overcoming this dichotomy in the Protestant Haitian mind necessitated that one retraces the Haitian Protestantism's history for a better understanding of the situation. In fact, social justice, for the Haitian Protestant, is not part of the church's mission. The Haitian Protestant should always keep the eyes on the heavenly city. The Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai through an educational program has confronted this way of thinking for a transformation of the Haitian Community of East Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York. To reach that goal it was an imperative to develop a methodology that would integrate Haitian categories, culture and history. Haitian "experience" came to play an important role in the demonstration of this project on social justice. Indeed from our experience as a people stemmed a theology and praxis. Kombi theology has provided to the community a matrix for a better understanding of God and his or her activity in the Haitian national history. This theology compels the members of the community to a joint endeavor to resist social injustice. This theology obliges one to give the self for the well being of the entire community.

The demonstration went through three phases, the consciousness raising, organizing Ambassadors for Christ and acting on two specific cases in labor and housing.

The demonstration of this project on social justice in Haitian Protestantism of East Flatbush has revolutionized the traditional view on life. Life is a whole came to realize the participants. Ambassadors for Christ, an organization for social justice, born from the demonstration of this project, will make history in the Haitian Protestantism of East Flatbush Brooklyn New York.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my gratitude to all who by their effort or their prayer have made possible the demonstration of this project. I want to mention the courageous group of L'Eglise De Dieu De La Verite, the church host, La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai, and Pastor Williere Pierre Louis. My appreciation goes to Sitter Mary France Myrthil who helped in the editing process.

I will not finish without bringing up the love and patience of Professor Dr. George D. McClain, my advisor who from the beginning has provided the indispensable lead and support until the finishing line.

**To my mother Jeanne, my son and daughters Samuel, Gaelle,
Cassandre and Tahina Joseph**

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I. Introduction To The Setting

- **Challenge Statement:**

There is a lack of social justice content in the ministry to the Haitian community that nurtures on one hand the social amnesia of the “haves”, and on the other hand the despair of the “have nots.” La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai in the East Flatbush area of Brooklyn will host for the Haitian Churches of East Flatbush an educational program. The challenge is to stimulate the leaders’ awareness and to develop their skills to act on social justice issues in the community.

- **The General Setting**

The socio-political situation that prevailed in the Homeland had caused many Haitians to flee their country by the thousands mostly during the eighties. The phenomenon “boat people” is well known of every one. Many of our compatriots had taken the risks on small boats in search of justice in a land where they were told that life is better than home. The Atlantic Ocean is a grave for many that had died without seeing their dream fulfilled. Many have succeeded to reach the shores of the Promised Land. According to the 2000 census there are 200,000 Haitians inhabitants in the Brooklyn area alone¹. Was social justice found after many years of struggles? Haiti is the second largest island in the West Indies after Cuba. Haiti is mostly populated by blacks, who were imported from Africa by the French colonizers for slavery in the sixteen-century. It is the first free Black Country in the world. The nation’s history is characterized mainly by struggles for survival in a hostile world.

The general setting of this demonstration project is the Northern Baptist Convention, a Haitian branch of the General Baptist Convention whose headquarters is in Chicago, Illinois. The creation of the Northern Baptist Convention was dictated by the flow of Haitians coming to the USA to be established. This ethnic branch of the mission is divided in two sub-districts. First, there is the upper northern district that encompasses the States of Massachusetts and Connecticut. Second, there is the Southern part that unites the States of New Jersey and New York. Each of the subdivisions has a Haitian director for the churches in their respective area. La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai is a member of the Southern part of the district.²

Social justice issues are not the strong points of Haitian Baptist or any other mainline Haitian Protestant church. Many factors have prevented ministry on social justice in the community. Their roots can be retraced in the political situation that had prevailed for the past generation. The few ministers who had taken the chance to speak on social justice issues in Haiti have lost their lives. Talking on social justice matter was like a taboo for the church. Ministers or the Church should not be involved in social justice, which was considered like getting involved in politics. Theology also plays an important role in the matter. Moreover, for the Haitian Baptist, suffering in an unjust world conforms to the biblical tradition. The reward is after death. It is understood why the reconstructed homeland church's practices continue to dominate, and consequently nurtures the lack of social Justice content in the ministry to the Haitian community. The Northern Baptist Convention is like the continuation of the homeland's faith practice.

¹ Shana Ashby-Jobes, Valerie Boisson, and Nana Akua Nuam, "Flatbush Avenue: Little Haiti," (ahwww.afterimagegallery.com/brooklyn.htm), accessed on 2-18-05.

² Interview with the Rev. Pastor Williere Pierre Louis on 2/2/04.

- **Institutional Setting**

The Church that hosted the project is a community of forty to fifty members. Six years ago the Rev. Williere Pierre Louis founded this community. The Rev. Pierre Louis is a Baptist minister who received his education from the most prestigious Baptist seminary in Haiti, Le Seminaire Baptiste du Limbe. It is located in the north part of Haiti near Cap Haitien, the second largest city of the country. This ecclesial community started as a house church with previous members and friends from the homeland. Now the church is being held in one of the front store buildings located on Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn, New York. It is interesting to indicate that, this part of Brooklyn that encompasses Flatbush and Nostrand Avenues from east to west and Church and Ditmas Avenues north to south is called by many "Little Haiti." The name is due to the high concentration of Haitians living in this area of Brooklyn.³

The primary language in this area of Brooklyn is Creole. This language is spoken among Haitians in almost every social setting. It is widely used among the individuals of this ethnic group.

As indicated earlier La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai is made up mainly of Haitian of second and third generations. The second generation is mainly constituted of Haitians adults coming from the homeland. The cultural background of this group is purely indigenous. The second group is made up of young people born here from Haitian parents and they have, as one might think, a double- identity. The dominant culture is of the receiving country and the culture inherited by the parents. Needless to say, there is a conflict of identity among the third generation people of this community. The duality is

reflected in the daily activities of the community. This conflict can also be observed between the American culture and the Haitian one at the adult level. This conflict or difference puts the adults at risk for being oppressed. This is a socio-political and economic oppression. Not having an American education plays a fundamental role in the fate of this community. According to Frank Etienne, owner of Paradise Connection (a store that sells English/ French media publication), the majority of Haitians, especially new arrivals, work at unskilled jobs in factories, service industries, and domestic service.⁴

There are many dynamics that are taking place in this community. These dynamics constitute the arena where the socio-economic fate of the community is being determined. They are the roadblocks that impede the socio-economic emancipation of the community. First, the cultural difference prevents the second generation from integrating fully into the main American culture. Second, there is the economic structure that oppresses the people. Thirdly, we have to mention racism, which keeps the community at the bottom of the pyramid. Fourth, we will not omit the exploitation of Haitians by Haitians in the work place. Some of our compatriots with seniority in the work place literally trade their Haitian brothers and sisters for a better wages. At time they would not even address their compatriots in the native language in order to hide their real identity. Basically these factors greatly impact the growth of the Church in all aspects. The Church's growth relies on the growth of its members.

³ Shana Ashby-Jobes, Valerie Buisson and Nana Akua Nuamah, Flatbush Avenue : Little Haiti, 3.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

- **Target Situation**

The complexity of the community's makeup makes it vulnerable in more than one aspect. The church in the community obviously has a lot to do if it is really called to transform our society. In many interviews I have conducted the interviewees indicated the lack of social justice ministry in the entire Haitian community. A seventy-three-year-old member I interviewed told me about the passivity of her congregation. She was fired at her job after 17 years of service without any benefits from her boss. When asked, how did you survive that event? Her answer was "individual prayer."⁵ Not too long ago I was talking to a member of the community in his house and the phone rang and it was his boss trying to convince him to go back to the job. The conversation lasted more than fifteen minutes and finally the boss said he would talk to the member's wife in order to convince him. The fact is, he pays him no more than 50 dollars for a day of work. The work he is doing is very technical. It consists of putting together electrical wheelchairs and going from house to house repairing them. The handicap is that he does not speak enough English.

Working in housekeeping is another area where social injustice is high. In many places, mostly in the Long Island area, their compatriots are oppressing many immigrants. Haitian women who do not have a legal status in the States are obligated to work as housekeepers or baby-sitters. It is touching to hear their story, the humiliation they go through, and the little salary they receive for the number of hours they have to put for the day. Some time they do not even have time to sleep because they can be awakened at any time to care for the baby. They are not considered as human beings with rights, but like slaves.

In an interview I had lately with Dr. Philius Nicholas, one among those who have seen the growth of the Haitian community in New York, said, “the majority will not make it.”⁶ That was his answer when I asked him about the situation of the Haitian community in an economic system where the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. When asked what to do about that majority his answer was clear: the church must not consist of only having worship services. The church must be involved in social justice ministry. The Rev. Dr. Philius has highlighted the inadequacy of our Haitian ministers working in the community. He said he is grateful for having come here and for receiving part of his education in the States. Those factors had allowed him to see ministry differently from most of his colleagues. We have to indicate Dr. Philius had played a key role in the settlement of many of our compatriots in New York.

I am also one of the blessed ministers for having received my theological education in the States and more specifically at New York Theological Seminary. In fact since my childhood I have had a burning fire for social justice. At one occasion I had almost gotten into trouble with some “Tonton Makout”⁷ from the oppressive regime of the Duvalier. They were forcibly taking goods from poor people who were trying to make a living by selling those goods in the streets. At that moment I had to run because I was about to interfere and I am sure I would have ended up in jail or I would have been killed. In another time I intervened to stop the beating of a young man. His fault was to hang at the back of an official government car. I will also mention my intervention at the New York Canadian border at the mistreatment of one of my compatriots going to Canada. When I got admitted at NYTS the first time for my M Div., I had realized that

⁵ Interview conducted with a seventy-three- year-old church member on 2/19/04.

⁶ Interview conducted with the Rev. Dr. Philius Nicholas in his office on 2/20/04.

God had given the passion I have for those who are under oppression and this is why it always strikes me the lack of concern for social justice in the ministry to the Haitian community. So many of them are facing difficulties and the churches seem to close their eyes on their suffering

I have conducted many interviews among ministers in the community. Some are formal and others informal. One constant that is being repeated is that social justice matters are not being addressed either in the preaching or in practical ministry. A ministry of advocacy on behalf of those unskilled workers or at least those unable to speak English would be of paramount importance. The interviewees also express interest in having some kind of organization that would stand for them in the school and in conflicts with their landlord. This project aimed at not only stimulating the awareness of the participating church's leaders, but also it envisioned an engagement in social justice ministry. The project sought to give hope to those that are in despair; to facilitate both individual and communal growth. The project endeavored also to break through the numbness of those "haves" that are so indifferent to the suffering of the majority. The Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai launched this program to promote a real transformation in our society.

⁷ The "Tonton Makout" was a secret police of the Duvalier regime, It was a paramilitary army.

II. Site Team Response

To: The Faculty of New York Theological Seminary

From: Rev. Williere Pierre Louis, Pastor, and Site Team president.

Re: Candidate Jean M Joseph and his project Social Justice and Haitian Protestantism In
The Community of East Flatbush New York.

It is such a privilege to thank New York Theological Seminary for its mission of preparing men and women for ministry. This letter is to say how much it was a blessing for La Duxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai to host the Demonstration of this project on social justice in the Haitian community. The project was completed to the Site Team's satisfaction. Our hope is that, the community will continue to benefit largely from the fruit of this project that is Ambassadors for Christ

Fraternally in Christ

Rev. Williere Pierre Louis, pastor.

III. Research

A. Historical Research

In his book *Les Eglises Protestantes En Haiti/ Communication et Inculturation*, Fritz Fontus, Th. D. makes a deep analysis of the Haitian Protestantism. His search aims at evaluating the Haitian Protestantism, its contribution in large to the Haitian society and its weak points.

The first missionaries arrived in Haiti in the year 1817 invited by the President Alexandre Petion who governed the western part of Haiti. They were John Brown and James Catts.⁸ Their primary goal was to establish a system of education in this part of the country. Christophe Henri who was the king of the Northern part of Haiti invited the Quakers to educate the young Haitians at that time.⁹ The first denomination to establish in Haiti was the Methodist Wesleyan Mission of London. The missionaries founded the Haitian Methodist Church.

Dr. Charles Froisset Romain identified four steps in the establishment of Protestantism in Haiti. First, the planting period, second a period of searching, third, a period of expansion, and finally, the present period.¹⁰ For the sake of interest, I will concentrate on the last two periods.

The expansion period started at the end of the 19th century and reached its highest peak in the 20th century. It is interesting to indicate that at that time and most specifically

⁸Fritz Fontus, *Les Eglises Protestantes en Haiti* (Paris, France : L'Harmattan, 2001), 64.

⁹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁰ Charles Romain, *Le Protestantisme Dans La Société Haïtienne* (Port-au-Prince : Imprimerie Deschamps, 1986), 17.

in the year 1915, the United States occupied Haiti. The political occupation led to a spiritual one. The missionary work that started timidly in the country became, to repeat Dr. Fritz Fontus' word "endemic."¹¹ He continues to say, "every American who had a few hundred dollars could take the first flight to Haiti and establish his or her mission."¹² No matter the missionaries' ideology, he adds, "they have brought enthusiasm and joy in the worship services. Before them the preaching was long and monotonous."¹³

Presently 40% of the total Haitian population is Protestant. We can say without a doubt that the missionary work in Haiti has been very successful in the sense that a large number of the population accepted the Protestant faith. Protestantism grew in the midst of Catholicism and Voodoo, the two main religions that were practiced in the land. On the other hand, the numerical growth is not translated in the spiritual realm, and the socio-economic aspect of the gospel was neglected. Dr. Fontus, in his work has established the difference between the theologians of the numerical growth of the church and the ones of the spiritual growth. According to the former, the primary responsibility of the church was to spread the gospel to as many people as possible. He cites Donald McGravan and Win Ann in *How to Grow a Church*. They believe that the numerical growth is the main reason that the church exists.¹⁴ The author indicates that there is a significant change in the position of those technicians of the numerical growth who now see quite differently. Dr. Fontus highlights the position of Orlando Costas and George Hunter III who indicate that the litmus test of evangelization is not to ask if the gospel is proclaimed. It is neither in discipleship nor in the social, political and economic liberation of people. The real test

¹¹ Fritz Fontus, *Les Eglises Protestantes en Haiti*, 88.

¹² Ibid., 88.

¹³ Ibid., 88.

¹⁴ Ibid., 101.

is in the “integration”¹⁵ of the three elements, proclamation, discipleship and liberation for a “global, coherent and dynamic testimony.”¹⁶

Using this paradigm of Orlando Costas and George Hunter III, it is obvious that the missionary work in Haiti largely failed. The stage of integration is far from being reached even at this time. The author of *Les Eglises Protestantes en Haiti* states that with the exception of a small group of liberal churches, Haitian Protestantism is mostly fundamentalist. They maintain that the socio-political aspect is not part of the church mission. The church should by no means be involved in politics. “Believers are foreigners and travelers in this world and they have to keep their eyes on the heavenly city.”¹⁷

The immediate implication of this theology is that the prophetic dimension of the proclamation is neglected. It is also important to mention the death threat towards the small groups that have at times tried to address the political and economic oppression that characterized the regimes in power. The prophetic voice is “timid”¹⁸ in Haiti says Dr. Fontus. Two Christian radio stations have tried to play a role of prime importance in denouncing the bloody regime in the eighties. The Catholic radio station, Radio Soleil and the Protestant’s Radio Lumiere have each challenged the political power of the time in its own way.¹⁹ They are exceptions to the rule, but silence in the political arena characterizes Haitian Protestantism.

¹⁵ Orlando Costas and George Hunter III .*The Integrity of Mission: The Inner Life and Outreach of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979). Fritz Fontus in his book uses this model of ‘ integration’ to evaluate the missionary work in Haiti. *Les Eglises Protestantes en Haiti*, 102.

¹⁶ Ibid., 102.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸ Ibid., 113.

¹⁹ Ibid., 114.

How can we retrace the influence of fundamentalism or evangelicalism in Haitian Protestantism?

Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid in *Diverse worship / African-American, Caribbean & Hispanic Perspectives* argues that “Euro-American essence”²⁰ characterize for while the traditional churches in those mission fields. Dr. Fontus affirms that the churches in Haiti are “copies conformes”²¹ or the “exact copies” of their mother churches.

The main beliefs that characterized the U. S. conservative fundamentalist are the same in the Haitian Protestantism. Among them are the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, the substitutionary atonement, the physical and literal resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.²² In the Haitian context the line between liberal and fundamentalist is very blurry since neither the liberal nor the fundamentalist would dare question the inerrancy of the Bible. As indicated by Pedrito U. Maynard-Rey, in the 1960s and the 70s a slight difference was seen in their views when the theology of liberation across Latin America had an “impact”²³ on some Caribbean circles. Mainly the churches in Haiti remain under the influence of conservative fundamentalism.

One of the project’s objectives was to emphasize the importance of “experience.” Our experience is what makes us what we are as people. This communal experience encompasses our history, our beliefs, culture our highs and lows. It takes in consideration our suffering and our joy. A dichotomy between our reality and the spiritual arena is a schism of the self and it does impede one to see the true God because God is one. A

²⁰ Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid, *Diverse Worship : African-American, Caribbean & Hispanic Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 113.

²¹ Fritz Fontus, *Les Eglises Protestantes en Haiti*, 146.

²² William Vance Trollinger, Jr., “Fundamentalism,” in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. by Donald W. Musser & Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 197.

²³ Maynard-Reid , 120.

separated self or a schizophrenic mind cannot see the Oneness of God although He or She can be seen from different angles. This Oneness encompasses all. Talking about worshipping God, Paul Brown indicates that the “language of worship must and should be the language of “experienced life.”²⁴ This is to me the only way one can really experience God’s presence and this is where spirituality stems from. Seeing life as a whole is one of the challenges among others that the project had to overcome. Because as indicated in the General Setting, the “reconstructed homeland Church’s practices continue to dominate in the community even in Diaspora.”²⁵ The cold reception of the project by the Haitian Clergy in the awareness phase expressed it all. There is hope because the few people who have taken the chance to get involved testify that they see it differently. The organization Ambassadors for Christ will make history in the Haitian Protestantism of East Flatbush, because until now we do not know of any other such Protestant Organization in the community.

I have to indicate that in the context of this project the members are not too afraid to express themselves because there is no fear of being arrested for one’s opinion. This factor has played in our favor. People can approach the subject of politics with more easiness. “Pastor, it seems to me you like politics,” said one of the sisters at the beginning of the project. Now the same sister confesses that politics is part of her daily life. Therefore, there is hope for a transformation of the community, the dawn of a new history.

The project is a practical one in a sense that it addresses the realities of life, but our hope is that one can see God in those realities of daily life. This would be the

²⁴ Maynard-Reid, 49.

²⁵ See General Setting, 1.

beginning of a theology from a Haitian perspective. This project on social justice in the Haitian community is really to bring together the different parts of the self, the spiritual and the material, and the community as a whole for a better picture and understanding of God.

B. Biblical Research

In an interesting reflection on the Johannine Eucharistic theology of John, chap. 6, Gail R. O' Day indicates that the teaching "Jesus the bread of life" is interconnected with two teachings of the Old Testament. First, there is the manna experience of Exodus chapter 16. Secondly, there is the invitation to freely given water and bread to those who are thirsty and hungry of Isaiah, chapter 55:1-2 and 50:10-11. In those two instances the imagery is that, the bread from heaven or word of God gives and sustains life. Jesus, the Incarnated Word of God, coming from God is the true bread of life. He gives eternal life to those who believe in him. The ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and died.

O' Day has deduced many implications from the Johannine Eucharistic theology. However I will consider in this context one point, the challenge of those churches that give a preponderant role to the one that presides over the Eucharist. She argues that the fourth gospel does not put an emphasis on the "institutionalization"²⁶ of the Eucharist but on Jesus the bread of life. Institutionalization implies "institutional control."²⁷ "The Eucharist is not Jesus' gift to an elite group of twelve who then mediate that gift to others. The Eucharist is Jesus' direct gift to those who believe".²⁸

In the miracle of multiplication of bread that precedes the Eucharistic teaching, Jesus himself distributes the bread and fish to the hungry. According to John, the disciples were not the ones who give the bread to the crowd. The connecting point or source of life is Jesus himself. Another important point that sheds the light on this is that

²⁶ According to O' Day, the churches have institutionalized Eucharist, this institutionalization is a mechanism of control. The main teaching in this Johannine context is that Jesus gives life and Jesus himself not, the elite of twelve communicates this life to the believers.

²⁷ Gail O' Day R., *The New Bible Interpreters*, Volume ix (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 613.

²⁸ Ibid., 614.

all the five thousand were satisfied (John 6:12). There was no exclusion in the miracle. Everyone's need was met.

The world has many economic systems that compete with one another and each one claims to be the best. However, the millions of people dying from hunger everyday challenge those claims. Even in the most affluent societies of the world, people experience the lack of the most basic needs of life. The lack of food, affordable housing and health care are common knowledge.

The immediate ramification of an institutionalized Eucharist is the dual concept of "power and access."²⁹ Who has the power to distribute and who can access the distribution becomes an issue. We know that race; social rank and sex play an important and determinant role in the shaping of those two concepts. The structural power in the body of Christ is quite often identical to that of the world. The issue becomes more critical when translated in the secular world. An elite few controls and determines when and who gets what. Evidently the elite, having possessed the power, always takes the lion's part to the detriment of the majority. Bearing in mind the ethical principle of the manna experience of Exodus, and the multiplication of bread, "Jesus the bread of life" seems to be at odds with the contemporary world's ethic. Life according to this world's philosophy consists of the accumulation of power and wealth by a minority to the exclusion of the majority. The minority in power seems to have a legitimate or a birth given right over the majority's fate. Two critical questions emerge here from this Johannine Eucharistic theology. The first one is: does the text suggest there should not be leaders or structural power in the church or the secular world? Another question

²⁹ O'Day, 614.

worth asking is does the text suggest an egalitarian society where everyone would have free access or the same share of the world's wealth?

No one could imagine a world without authority or without a mechanism of control. The concept of power is in the realm of creation. Authority and power usually walk together. What one does with power or how one use his or her power makes all the difference. In ancient Israel, the king or the religious leaders were considered shepherds. They were called to care for the people, not to exploit or exclude them from society. In the New Testament, Jesus' power was in solidarity with the poor. Inclusiveness was part of Jesus' theology. In the secular world, democratic principles appear to take in consideration such concern for people. Those elected should defend and protect through all kinds of law the people they represent. It is understood that no human law will be able to satisfy everyone's concern in a given society. Somehow, some people's interest will be left out. That is where politics and ethics intersect according to Paul Ricoeur. In his book *Oneself As Another* he talks about the ethical principle of "practical wisdom."³⁰ It consists of taking in account as many people's interest as possible. The political machine should be propelled by the common input of every part that constitutes it. Every part of the machine should participate in the effort to make it work and in the benefit of having it work. No part of the machine should be left behind. Joel Feinberg in *Social Philosophy* argues that there must be some kind of "injustice" in the distribution of income between the 5% of the Americans at the top and the 20% at the bottom.³¹ Are there any divine or human laws that justify an economic system in which the rich become richer and the poor poorer?

³⁰ In his book *Oneself As Another*, Paul Ricoeur stands for an area of intersection of politics and ethic in which the most possible voices should be heard, that is "practical wisdom."

One of the mechanisms that distributive justice uses in the distribution of wealth or benefit in any fair or free economic system is the principle of material justice.³² The principle in a given system takes everyone's case separately. It advocates for certain compensation on behalf of those who do not have equal opportunities to start with in the system. Although material justice is an apparatus that helps in bridging the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots," on the other hand it helps perpetuate the gap. Not everyone's interest, talent or contribution is the same in a system. Consequently, the reward will be different. The principle implies that I have to help the poor for not having equal opportunities because of factors such as race, gender and social class that play against them. Material justice does also imply that I cannot blame the rich for being born in a rich family. If the rich invest more, it is just that he gets more in return. In another word, the equation will remain the same. Justice in this case requires that a mechanism of fair laws be put in place, to protect the weak from the oppressive power of the rich. It is obvious that the problem of inequality in our society is a dilemma, in a sense that no one approach is able to solve the problem. Equality will not be reached on only the fact that every one is human. Equalitarian principle is inadequate. In fact the leitmotiv of our time is that the rich get richer and the poor poorer. Power, control, and their consequences are all unavoidable in the context of our self-centered society. Professor Walter Bruggemann argues that "numbness"³³ is a way of life of any affluent society. "Corporate economies expect blindness to the cost of poverty and exploitation,"³⁴ he continues to say. This is the fate of our society; the pain and suffering of the majority are

³¹ Joel Feinberg, *Social Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Practice Hall, 1991), 108.

³² Feinberg, 108.

³³ Walter Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), 88.

³⁴ Bruggemann, 86.

silenced at their lowest level. The ruling class seems not to hear the cries or to feel the pain of the poor. In fact, a system cannot see or feel and that is why it is sine qua non to put a human face over the system.

The believer, rich or poor, by a direct contact with Jesus the bread of life overcomes the handicap of being a number among others. Uniqueness is indispensable in Jesus' economy because everyone's needs must be satisfied. Jesus the true bread of life is relevant to our time because to partake of the Eucharist is willingness to die to the self. The true bread of life destroys self-centeredness to let compassion step in one's life. Jesus bread of life gives new meaning to one's life. A life no longer governed by the greed for money but by the basic principle that God is our common Father who creates everything and provides for the well-being of his children. Our affluent society needs a new ethical approach that can only be found in a new perspective of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity as a religious system or institution cannot solve the problem. The solution is in a direct connection with Jesus the true bread of life. Sharing Jesus the bread of life builds community like the early Christian community understood it.

Max Weber, in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in a comparative study of the world religions, indicates that Calvinism with its doctrine of calling is at the very root of this drive of getting money for the sake of money, which characterizes our contemporary world. According to Weber, Protestantism is, among others, a cause of the ever-unsatisfied thirst for money in the Western World. Capitalism has always existed, he said, but not under this present form.³⁵ Things have not changed

³⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit Of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1958), 17.

since the last study of Max Weber. The same spirit of greed for power and money persists in spite of technologic and scientific advances.

The encounter of Zaccheus was with Jesus, not with religion. It engendered a new beginning for the tax collector who began to see and understand life differently. Jesus the true bread of life broke through the wall of Zaccheus' numbness. Zaccheus needed a human heart to feel and understand other people's suffering. The rich will find true legitimacy of their status by not silencing the voice of the poor or being blind to their condition but by being compassionate. The acceptance of others and self that Zaccheus was longing after, he found in a personal encounter with Jesus the bread of life.

Simplicity of heart is one of the dividends that our community is longing after. This simplicity of heart is revealed to us in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. This indispensable ethical principle of life is revealed to us also through the practice of Kombit. The sharing and partaking of meals in a Kombit mirrors exactly what Jesus did, the gift of his life and the shedding of his blood for a meaningful life in his community and the entire world. This is why partaking of the Eucharist is so important to our community. It connects us first to Jesus the bread of life and that life is communicated to one another in the community

C. Theological Research

In the theological component of my proposal I indicated that God reveals Godself through our experience as a people. Kombit is a socio-economic institution in the Haitian rural areas in which Godself is revealed to the nation in order that it may know who God is and that it may as a nation live a life worthy to God who creates us all. This institution as indicated earlier has served the nation in overcoming the roadblocks on its journey as the first black people in the world that had destabilized slavery to become a nation. Coercive power helped the French master to exploit both the land and the people for his own profit and that of the French Republic. It also helped the colonizer to dehumanize the slaves to the point that the slave might consider the self as an object or inferior.

The practice of Kombit gave to the newly freed slave a sense of interdependence and community as it is manifested in the fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. This secular practice taught the new nation the way to a real and a meaningful life. The former slaves rediscovered their identity and humanity, which God had given them. Kombit helped the newly freed men and women learn to appreciate the self and others. We have to indicate that the slaves came from different parts of Africa. They were from different tribes. The inhumane trade of slavery had paradoxically united them. The common suffering of those slaves had created a matrix for dialogue and unity. It had also served to build community and that was the act of a free God in human history.

Jurgen Moltmann in *The Crucified God* talks about “political hermeneutics” that reflects the new situation of God in the inhumane situation of humanity, in order to break down the hierarchical relationships which deprive them from self-determination, and to

develop their humanity.”³⁶ This is to us in the Haitian community or at least in the context of this project what Incarnation is all about, Jesus with us in our struggle to liberate us in order to rebuild our community.

As one can imagine this concept of community or *konomia* is fundamental in my understanding of Jesus’ mission. His ministry depicted to us faithfulness to the communities he belongs, the Godhead and the human one. Jesus’ mission infuses in us a higher sense of our humanity and a theology of responsibility toward our Creator and our neighbor. The fulfillment of this responsibility communicates unity in the community and peace at last. It is understood that in Jesus’ case the higher community involves the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. “I glorify you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do”(John 17: 4). His prayer in the same chapter is that the disciples who would become the Church, his body on earth, may be a united community as the Godhead is united. Unity here encompasses the Oneness of the Godhead from everlasting to everlasting, and throughout human history. There is beauty in unity. “How very good and pleasant when kindred live together in unity.” (Ps. 133:1) It is of prime importance to indicate the Hebrew adjective for pleasant *My9fnA* denotes the idea of gracefulness, beauty or harmony.

The free self-sacrifice of Jesus for a free humanity infers to our community how human suffering and oppression matter to God. The self-sacrifice of Jesus indicates to us that, members of a given community need to give themselves, and take action for the common good of everyone in this community. It helps also to develop a theology of resistance against the enemy of God hidden behind the oppressive power of this world. This is the only way one will be able to please God. Paul in Philippians indicates that

³⁶Jurgen Moltman, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974), 318.

because Jesus has given himself by obeying the Father to the point of death even death on a cross, therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name (Phil.2: 8-9). Christ' divinity is found here through his faithfulness to his mission on behalf of the human community. In another word his deity was hidden in the fullness of his humanity. The Roman Centurion facing Jesus when he breathed his last said, "Truly this man was God's Son" (Mk.15:39). According to the gospel of Mark Jesus' deity can be seen not necessarily in the miracles but in carrying out his mission until his death on the cross. In John chapter 17 Jesus requests that the Father glorifies him because He has made the Father's name known to those He gave him in the world. Eternal life for us in the community is found in being faithful to our mission as a member of a community as Jesus was. During the Bible study component of the project, the community came to a better understanding of the meaning of Eucharist. Yes, the bread and the wine symbolize the body and the blood of Christ for Salvation of the community, but partaking of the holy table invites one also to follow the footstep of the Master by giving the self to free our community.

It was such a privilege for me to grow up in a small town in the northern part of Haiti where on so many occasions I experienced the artistic and joyful moments of Kombit. Everyone in the immediate community is aware on that day that a neighbor is having a Kombit and everyone is welcome. From children to adults everyone will play a role in the Kombit. Inclusiveness is primordial in Kombit. The work can be of any nature mostly agricultural. Early on that day there is the "major lambi"³⁷ who reminds the people of the event and he invites them to come. When one gets to the location all kinds

of activities are in place. The cooks who are preparing the meals for the day; there are those who go to the nearest body of water to get water for the cooks and the laborers who will soon be thirsty under the sun. There are the “sambas”,³⁸ with their songs and the beat of their drums that regulate the rhythm of the workers. At a certain time the workers may display a straight line while performing in the field at other times, a circle. It is such a beautiful and artistic event but let me say that it is also a learned practice. If you do not know how to follow the rhythm or the cadence of your co-workers you may get hurt or hurt others with the machete or the tool with which you are working. It takes practice and the awareness of other’s rights for one to live a meaningful life in community. Acceptance and tolerance are indispensable in any society of justice. I will also mention the free distribution of “clairin”³⁹ that gives the energy to dance and sing while doing the work. At the end people will gather and eat the second and last meal of the day while sitting on the ground. Banana leaves can be used as dishes instead of regular plates. Simplicity of heart or humility must be part of a society of love and justice.

As indicated earlier, the practice was a form of resistance against imperialism. The practice gave to the community a glimpse of the eschatological community to come and a real sense of the kingdom of God. It propelled us to action against injustice for a better society. David J. Bosch in *Transforming Mission /Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* states that “those who know that God one day will wipe away all tears will not

³⁷ “Major Lambi” is the term designating a musician with a special kind of instrument announcing the kombit. The lambi is a conch shell that can be heard far away and the slaves used to use it to pass out secret messages for meeting.

³⁸ Samba is the term associated with a musician who freely or spontaneously composes a song. The song can be anything or everything; it is mostly a hot topic that is going on in the community. The sambas beat the drums that instill joy and rhythm while work is being performed.

³⁹ The “clairin” is a local type of alcohol made from the sugar cane. Poor people mostly consume it, whereas people in the middle class will drink the Rhum Barbancourt a national rum or other kind of imported alcohols.

accept with resignation the tears of those who suffer and are oppressed now...And anyone who believes that the enemy of God and humanity will be vanquished will already oppose him now in his machination in family and society.”⁴⁰ In kombit the community anticipates and celebrates the kingdom of God.

For this theology to be operative two concepts are indispensable: the seeing of the kingdom and the working towards it. Kombit, in the context of the project, is trying to bridge the gap between the “now” and the “yet to come” by opposing the oppressive force against community in the realm of labor and housing. We believe that justice will prevail. Paul insists that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom.8: 21). And this is our endeavor and our hope in Ambassadors for Christ, working toward a society of love and justice in the immediate community, a society where men and women could be in harmony with one another and in harmony with nature.

There cannot be harmony under oppression. How can we sing the song of Zion in the land of oppression? The harps must be hung up on the willows (Ps.137: 1-2). There cannot be joy or harmony in a society of oppression but tears and suffering. Boukman, a Vodou priest, in the ceremony of Bois Caiman, captured this truth in his prayer in the night of November 29, 1791:⁴¹

⁴⁰ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission : Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N. Y. : Orbis Press, 2000), 400.

⁴¹ Cited in the methodological component.

Bon Die qui fait soleil qui claire nous en haut;
Qui souleve la mer, qui fait gronde l'orage;
Bon Die, zottes tende, cache nan youn nuage;
La li gade nou, li oue tou ca blan fait;
Bon Die blan mande crime, et pa nou an vle bienfait;
Mais Die la qui si bon ordonne nous veangeance;
Li va condui bra nou, ba nou assistance;
Jete potrait Die blan qui soif dlo nan zies;
Coute la liberte qui parle nan coeur nou tout.

The God who created the sun which gives us light,
Who rouses the waves and rules the storm,
Though hidden in the clouds, he watches us.
He sees all that the white man does.
The God of the white man inspires him with crime,
But our God calls upon us to do good works.
Our God who is good to us orders us to revenge our wrongs.
He will direct our arms and aid us.
Throw away the symbol of the God of the whites
Who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty,
Which speaks in the hearts of us all.⁴²

⁴² The prayer of Boukman is a well known one in the Haitian history mostly, the Vodou. See Laennec Hurbon, *Voodoo: Search For The Spirits* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publisher, 1994) 45.

Oppressors always expect legitimacy of their practice but it turns out to be the opposite because everyone bears the image of God. The freedom to decide for the self and the right to express one's opinion are inherent to human nature. The equilibrium of harmony is broken everywhere that a dominant class oppresses other people. It is vital to highlight at this time that the oppressor can be of any color: white, black or yellow.

Adam was given the right to subdue the earth and to fill it. He was given dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and other living things that move on the earth, but not over his fellow human beings (Gen.2: 28). It is a disgrace to see human beings dominate or exploit other human beings for the sake of order. In their theology order is to be synonymous with harmony when in fact it is the contrary. In the history of creation the beauty and harmony come from the interdependence of each element in the created world, as diverse as they may be.

A Kombit theology takes into consideration the fact that everyone in the community has the right to freedom as God himself is free. This freedom, as one can see, is not the self- satisfying aspiration of a dominant person, class or group, but the God given right of every member to participate and enjoy the community's life. Participation here encompasses the investment of one's life in another life. The implication here is to find the self in another and it goes beyond seeing the other as oneself. At this time in human history everyone may agree that all men and women are created in the image of God. Not everyone, however, will accept to invest in someone else's life. This is exactly what Jesus did on the cross. "This is my body that is for you" (I Cor.11:24). What a paradox, meaningful life is in self-giving.

The implication requires the symbiotic relationship of everyone in the community as it is manifested in the created world. This is for us beauty and harmony. This beauty and harmony are revealed to us in the relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is clear why a Trinitarian understanding of God is so helpful to our Kombit theology. This beauty and harmony, both in the economy of the Godhead and in nature, become a target for our community in our quest for justice.

D. Socio-Economic Research

I want to start this section of my research by paying a tribute of gratitude to Tara Deporte for her study on the Haitian woman in New York, mostly in Brooklyn where the majority of our compatriots are living.

In *Kinship, Global, And Local*, written in May 1, 2001, Tara Deporte retraced the socio-economic role of the Haitian woman in New York. In fact this role is a learned familial function for the Haitian woman ever since her childhood in the homeland. In the Haitian culture motherhood is a key function considering the fact that the mother is the one who technically raises the children. Haitian women are always at the front line for economic survival in the homeland. The history of “Madam Sara”⁴³ or “Ms Sara” is proverbial in the economical development of our country. Those women defy all kind of difficult situations, from leaving their houses for days, sleeping in a public market place, to riding on top of big truck, in order to raise their children. Many of our Haitian men and women owe their education to the practice of “Madam Sara.” It is needless to explain why, according to the 1992 World Development Report, of the 234,757 emigrants from Haiti in the year 1990, 53% were women⁴⁴. A hand of applause for those heroic mothers who have devoted themselves entirely to their loved ones.

In the introduction to the setting I already indicated the fate of the Haitian community that came to American soil by different means and without a basic education. The inability to read and speak English put the Haitian emigrant at a disadvantage.

⁴³ Madam Sara or Mrs. Sara is the name given to the Haitian women who go from city to city in the homeland in order to buy and sell goods. When they become stronger they will request a visa to go to the neighboring Dominican Republic and later on a visa from the U.S.A. embassy will be grand to them. Those women are the ones who mostly grow up the Haitian population in the New York and Miami areas.

According to the U. S. Census only 25% of the Haitian population living in the U. S. had more than a high school diploma with 60% having less than a high school diploma. The same 1990 Census indicated that 74% were making less than \$20,000 per year, and only 10% were making over 29,000 per year.⁴⁵ Considering the living cost in the New York area, this figure places the average Haitian below the poverty line.

The U.S. Department of Commerce 1990 national census reported that approximately a total of 108,690 people claiming Haiti as their homeland live in the New York area out of a total of 292,036 living in the U.S. The majority of Haitians (87%) live in New York, Florida, Massachusetts and New Jersey, mainly in the cities of Miami, New York, Boston and the East Orange area of the New Jersey.⁴⁶ It is of paramount importance to indicate that “kinship”⁴⁷ plays a key role in the choice of those cities as receiving place for those emigrants. This phenomenon of kinship has helped the U.S. authorities considerably in the settlement of our compatriots in the years of the eighties and nineties when the boat people phenomenon had reached its peak.⁴⁸

This kinship, as one can imagine, is fundamental to one’s orientation freshly coming to the States. Wherever I work is where I will take someone else to work. The church I go to is where I will eventually take the friend or the family member. Even those who were educated in the homeland went through the same process to get situated. When I first came to the States a friend of mine told me, “Djo I cannot do anything for you but I

⁴⁴ Statistics from the 1992 World Development Report, used by Tara Deporte in her work on the Haitian women in New York.

⁴⁵ Tara Deporte *“Invisible Boundaries, Visible attributes: Haitian Women in New York City”* (WWW.Haiti2004Lakay.org/com-Dixieme/Haitian-women-Nyc.html), 15. Accessed on 7-22-05.

⁴⁶ Deporte, 3.

⁴⁷ Kinship or “blood ties” is the terminology used by Tara Deporte to explain the social phenomenon of a relative or a friend that host somebody recently coming from the homeland.

⁴⁸ See Introduction to the Setting, Dr. Philius Nicholas has indicated that his church was converted into a shelter to receive the thousands of Haitians coming in the U.S. soil in the eighties.

can take you to where I am working.” He did take me to a factory in South Plainfield, New Jersey, on the 11 – 7 shift. I was living in Brooklyn and I had to leave home at nine o’clock to reach there on time. On my way back, because of the morning traffic, the earliest I could get to Brooklyn was 9:30 a.m. or 10 a. m. It was not long, two or three months later that I fell at the job and broke both arms. I was transported to a hospital at night unable to speak the dominant language, away from my family on my own. It was very stressful. Did I receive workers’ compensation? My stay at the hospital was paid and I did receive a few weeks of work compensation and that was the deal according to the lawyer who represented me. I believe my odyssey is not unique. There are countless stories out there.

One point to make here is that kinship is like a moral obligation because most of the time the living conditions in the receiving home are not that great. In other words to add someone else to an apartment that was already too small for the existing family is really a sacrifice. So one can understand the overcrowded conditions our people are living in.

The following table from The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Decennial Census 1990 indicates the occupations of Haitian Americans.

Employment	Number	Percent
Service	61,321	38%
Tech. Sale and Admin	36,582	21%
Laborers, Operators	33,784	19%
Managerial, Professional	22,221	13%
Precision, production, Craft	11, 311	7%
Farming, Forestry, Fishing	6,714	4%
Other	1,362	1%
Total	173,295	100%

From this table it is clear that 38% of our compatriots work in the service industry. This is where most of our women end up. In an inquiry conducted by Tara Deporte about where in New York city Haitian women are working, she received an e-mail saying that in a local YMCA all the locker room workers were Haitian women.⁴⁹ We know that service work is not a high paying job. It is needless to talk about the quality of life in this context. Those women are most of the time single with children and they are still caring for the loved ones left behind in the homeland. The table says it all. The community is at the bottom of the pyramid. Our research is not gender oriented like the source that I have used; however it just gives a glimpse of the socio-economic situation of the Haitian community in the New York City area. As the census indicated, 74% were making less than \$20,000 per year. Of course there must be some changes in the data because they are more than a decade⁵⁰ old; however they give an indication of the trend.

Curtis Taylor and Pete Bowles in an article *Raising The Roof* talk about rent hikes and the cost of housing in New York City. They quote Angelique Hagoo, 27, an office assistant making \$28,000 per year. She said, “We need affordable homes that we can afford to pay for.”⁵¹ The article was written in the context of a meeting between the city officials and the landlords in the city. The hike was 2% to 4.5% for 1-year lease and 4% to 7% for a 2 years lease. A speaker for tenant advocates stated: “ Any rental hike could

⁴⁹ Deporte, 15.

⁵⁰ Candidate has unsuccessfully done other research, but he could not access any specific data for the Haitian community from the 2000 national U.S. Census.

⁵¹ Curtis Taylor & Pete Bowles, “Raising The Roof” *Newsday*, 4 May 2005.

force some New Yorkers into the cold by removing them from the city's already scarce rent stabilized housing stock.”⁵²

Where does the Haitian community fit in the picture? The answer to the question is not such a difficult one. With an income of less than \$20,000 a year the majority of the community is forced to live in overcrowded apartment and hazardous conditions. One person cannot afford to pay the cost of an apartment on his or her own. It is understood why two families sometimes have to share the burden. We have to mention also the cost of utility bills that make the burden heavier. It is of prime importance that single women head most of those households with children.⁵³ Tara Deporte indicates that “Just looking at the cost of housing in New York or Brooklyn, where it is difficult to find a one bedroom efficiency for less than \$ 600/ month shows how little a salary of \$ 20,000 provides.”⁵⁴ In 2004, the National Poverty Center indicated that “ poverty rates are highest for families headed by single women, particularly if they are black or Hispanic.”⁵⁵ The rate is 28.4% according to the same source.

What can be done and by whom? This is the dilemma. It must be a joint endeavor from both the “haves” and the “haves not.” The effort will start with the insistent request of the poor and end with the willingness of the rich to alleviate the burden on the poor. This will necessitate a dialogue between the “haves” and the “have nots.” Dialogue is sine qua non to achieve justice in our society.

⁵² Cited by the same article “Raising The Roof.”

⁵³ Deporte, 15.

⁵⁴ Deporte, 15.

⁵⁵ National Poverty Center > Poverty Facts (npc.umich.edu/poverty). Accessed on 2-15-06.

E. Spiritual Practice Research

In his book *Jesus Before God/ The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus*, Hal Taussig argues that the historical Jesus did not have a theology of prayer. There is no place in the New Testament where one sees him reflecting on the subject of prayer in God terms. In the model of prayer that Jesus taught to his followers, however, in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, a glimpse could be found of Jesus' theology of prayer. The author emphasizes the "engagement of the social situation"⁵⁶ of the ones praying to God that is obvious in "Our Father" model of prayer.

This "engagement of the social situation," opposes the dualism that usually characterizes the mind of the one who approaches God in prayer. Hal Taussig continues to say that the dualism can be noted in two kinds of prayer. First there is what the author calls the "experience of escaping"⁵⁷ and second there is the "interiorizing effort."⁵⁸ The first type relates to the prayer in which the one who prays evades his or her reality. The second has to see to a split soul-body in which we try to reach God by the projection of our thoughts or voices. The author highlights that the prayer that is in agreement with the Jesus model of prayer is the "relational"⁵⁹ one. This prayer put us in relation with God and our situation. It put us in connection with God and others. God is the connector.

Hal Taussig has used a concept that is very dear to me in the context of this project, the one of "in-between-ness"⁶⁰ of God. This "in-between-ness" of God in nature makes it possible for us to speak to a mountain (Mat.21: 21), for instance. The Haitian

⁵⁶ Taussig Hal, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA.: Polebridge Press, 1999), 128.

⁵⁷ Taussig, 128.

⁵⁸ Taussig, 128.

⁵⁹ Taussig, 130.

⁶⁰ Taussig, 131.

community and more specifically the members of the mission group have reflected on the concept and internalized it.

Through our reflection as a suffering community, we have seen the “in-between-ness” of God in Moses’ and Pharaoh’s case. This “in-between-ness” of God is the very cause that prompted the liberation of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. Therefore in the context of this project as a community we have learned that God is acting between oppressors and oppressed. Prayer has played and it will continue to play a key role in our struggle for social justice. Moreover, the few cases that, Ambassadors for Christ have worked on have allowed us to realize the indispensability of meditative prayer. Prayer is a weapon in our struggling against social justice.

As a community we will continue to pray the prayer that connects us with our reality and with God. We will pray and act against social injustice knowing that God is in between the different social strata and for sure he or she is acting on behalf on the oppressed. I have to indicate that that was one of the challenges that the project had to overcome because the “experience of escaping” type of prayer is the one that usually our community prays. The two-world division in the Haitian mind had caused a great deal of handicap to its spirituality. The “living experience” is always neglected and that had caused us to overlook the problem of social justice in our community. The “relational prayer” is an imperative for change in our community and society in general. We will continue to pray in relation to our situation, to others and to God for the kingdom to come.

IV. Plan of Implementation

Goal I.

To create awareness of social justice issues such as labor and housing among the Christian Baptist leaders in the Haitian community of East Flatbush through education and bible study. I will use all along the project a paradigm well known by the members of the community, the one of “Kombit”⁶¹ or “togetherness.”

Strategy 1 of Goal I

I will go to a monthly meeting of the Haitian Clergy Association early March to talk about the project. I will bring to the meeting two members of the community who will share their experience, one at the work place and the other a husband who has recently lost his wife because of the inhuman conditions they were living in an apartment that they rented. The wife just died from pneumonia at age 47.

Evaluation Criteria of Strategy 1

A). Pre and post questionnaires will be distributed by the candidate to collect data on concern for social justice in one’s personal life and in the community

b) Follow up inquiries from the leaders of the community will be an indicator whether the goal was reached and the extent to which it was attained. My hope is that at least 50 % of the leaders present will be motivated and involved in social justice issues.

⁶¹ Minsky, Tequila states that “Kombit” is a word coined in rural Haiti which means a cooperating group working together. See article “Coumbite: Gathering to Fete Haiti’s Culture, Examine Haiti’s Reality” *Caribbean Life* Brooklyn and Staten Island Edition, 23 November 2004. Jennie M, Smith has made an

Strategy 2 of Goal I

I will preach from February to May during three Sundays or so on social justice issues both in the community of “La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El Shaddai” and “L’Eglise de Dieu de la Verite” where I usually preach each month. During a fourth Sunday, hopefully the very end of May, a bible Study on the subject: “Whether or Not the Church should be engaged in the struggle for social justice” will be held.

Evaluation of Strategy 2, of Goal II

Pre and post questionnaires will be distributed and collected by the candidate before and after each sermon between the end of March and the month of April. The questionnaires will indicate the interest in the project and the rate of participation in the Mission Group. It will also show people’s position on the subject.

Strategy 3 of Goal I

I will distribute flyers to the people in the community and mostly the churches from the month of February to March.

Evaluation of Strategy 3

The rate of participation in the project will indicate the effectiveness of the method. People will volunteer for the Mission Group creation. The candidate and the site team will conduct both the evaluations after the creation of the mission group, hopefully by the month of May. My aim is that 10 to 15 people will volunteer to participate in the mission group.

exhaustive study on Kombit. See *When The Hands Are Many: Community Organization And Social Change in Rural Haiti* (Utica: Cornell University Press, 2001).

Goal II

I will create a mission group to help in the implementation of the project. I will train the group in social justice issues through seminars, bible studies and site visit. Other guest speakers will be invited to talk on the subject of housing and labor.

Strategy I of Goal II

A sequence of four bible studies every other week will be held with the mission group. These studies will focus on Jesus the defender of the poor and the challenger of the existing religious, political establishment of his epoch. In a spirit of Kombit coffee or other beverages will be served at every meeting. The month of June and July are devoted for those studies.

Evaluation of Strategy 1 of Goal II

a) A survey chart will be developed and conducted by the candidate on social justice issues among the members of the Mission Group. The parameter of evaluation is how awareness on structural social justice in the Haitian community is increased?

b) Each participant will teach at least 15 minutes of each session. It will be a way of participation or contribution of each participant using the paradigm Kombit. This modus operandi will attenuate the patron role of the teacher in our Sunday school or our Bible study. The candidate will do the evaluation using questionnaires. The questionnaire will challenge the participant's knowledge on structural social justice issues.

Strategy 2 of Goal II

I will organize at least 2 seminars on housing and labor that will reflect the living conditions of the target community. Two experts on housing and labor will be invited to present on their respective discipline. The month of August is selected for the seminars.

Evaluation of Strategy 2

Each participant in the mission group will be able to explain the problem of structural social justice. The candidate and the mission group will conduct the evaluation using a chart for each presenter.

Strategy 3 of Goal II

I will organize a site visit of Interfaith Family Network (INF) in the New Jersey. July is the target month for the site visit.

Goal III

The mission group and I will create a social justice organization, which will help the Haitian community to stand against social injustice at the work place and the housing system through advocacy

Strategy 1 of Goal III

a) The mission group and I will start working on some social justice cases in the Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai, and I will get the Mission Group involved in the process. This practical aspect of the project will be started right after the formation of the mission group and it will be done jointly with the other components.

The process will consist, first, of getting the identified case person's consent for help. Second, a letter of advocacy from the mission group to the employer will be sent and third, the mission group will be united in prayer for the success of the enterprise.

Other legal steps, of course, will be considered with the consent of the recipient if nothing happens in the first move.

The same process will be taken for the known housing case. Advocacy first, and the legal step in case of failure of the initial one.

b) I will encourage the Mission Group members to replicate in their Church an organization on social justice and act on it in the fall. From November, the end of the project, the candidate will maintain contact with the members to ensure that the passion for social justice is kept alive and it is being materialized in actual defense of those in need in the community.

Evaluation

Social justice issues such as housing and labor will be impacted. The “haves” and the “haves not” will be concerned on social justice issues. One of the advantages of the model is that it requires some training for its practice. By fitting on a common front against social injustice, one must first fight against his or her own propensity to greed. One must watch over the danger of the love of money that pushes one to oppress his or her brother and sister. Mammonism or the cult of materialism is endemic in our society.

The transformation, as one may realize, is first personal in a sense that it entails a theology that will be translated in praxis. Praxis necessitates an engagement in seeking justice and this is really the realm in which the project will be measured. The difference can be made in some people’s lives but the transformation will be more spiritual for the participants who will see God through a different lens and be willing to be co-workers with God for a better world in which justice prevails.

I have to mention the parameter of culture that is of paramount importance. The cultural gap between the Haitian community and the receiving land will be decreased and will allow a fuller participation of the community in the system.

These parameters will constitute the evaluation criteria for the project. It will be an overall survey conducted by the site team, the mission group and the candidate at the end of the project on November 2005.

V. Actual Implementation of the Project

A. Raising Awareness

Goal I “To create awareness of social justice issues such as labor and housing among the Christian Baptist leaders in the Haitian Community of East Flatbush through education and bible study. Throughout the project, I will use a paradigm well known to the members of the community, Kombit or togetherness.”

Goal 1 Strategy 1

- Presentation to the Haitian Clergy Association

On May 9, 2005 as convened, the candidate went on to meet with the Haitian clergy Association. That meeting was considered the starting point of the project, the awareness phase. The meeting started at 8 P.M. and on the agenda the candidate was the main speaker. The Association’s president, a member of the site team, gave me fifteen minutes for the presentation. The candidate managed to present the project’s main ideas and phases to the audience. The pre and post questionnaires were the media through which the presentation was made. Ideas on the role of the Haitian Protestantism on social justice issues, personal experiences on the matter, and interest in the project were crafted in the questionnaires. Twenty-five ministers were present at the meeting. Eight percent returned the questionnaires and expressed the willingness to participate in the project.

Two important facts to highlight are, first, the short period of time prevented me from allowing the two members of the community the opportunity to share their convincing experience on housing and labor, and, secondly, the quasi unresponsiveness of the audience. A sister invited by one of the members in the community was allowed to

In his book *The Prophets*, Abraham J. Heschel establishes the difference between two Hebrew words dealing with the concept of justice, the Hebrew word **FPAw4m9** (*mishpat*), *judgment* and the one of **hAdAc4** (*tsedakah*) righteousness.⁶³ The difference between the two resides in the fact that *mishpat* is considered to be an act of justice and *tsedakah*, the quality of a person. The term *tsedakah* implies kindness, benevolence and generosity. It goes beyond justice (*mishpat*), which is to give to everyone his or her exact due. *Tsedakah* is embedded in compassion and they usually walk together in the literature of the Old Testament. This twentieth chapter of Matthew connects these two kinds of justice and it helped me to indicate the prevalence of justice- compassion that concerns my project.

Given the type of audience I had, I did not distribute pre and post questionnaires. After the service, however I had a meeting with the members and the feedback was encouraging. There were some concerns on whether people of the Catholic faith would be involved in the project. I assured them the project would involve Haitian Protestantism in the East Flatbush area. I must indicate that this is a congregation relatively old in age, but out of the twenty-four members present, four volunteered to participate in the mission group. Later three other members joined the group. The remainder because of age and other related difficulties could not participate. “I am behind you and I will pray for the success of the project,” said a female member

⁶³ Heschel, Abraham J., *The Prophets* (Peabody, Ma.: Prince Press, 2000) 201.

Goal I Strategy 3

- Raising Awareness -Final phase.

All along the project and until now, one of the points I have tried to work on is to raise the awareness on social justice issues. Wherever I go, I will always find a way to bring the subject up. At the work place, in churches that I have visited, social justice concerns will surface by my intervention. I must say that this approach was developed because of the failure of the flyers strategy. During the first months of the project, April and May, a brother and I went on many occasions to distribute flyers but no one responded. The people that came to be part of the project became interested either through the preaching on social justice or the one on one approach. During a morning report, my boss said to me, “Joseph, on that I agree with you because the administration does not care; this is why we have such a cheap medical coverage.” One supervisor was complaining of the amount of money she had to co- pay to fill a prescription. The question on the table was how much does the insurance policy really pay.

It is impossible to come with factors that would evaluate how awareness has taken place through this project on social justice but this statement does indicate that the people are more tuned to social justice issues. Thirteen people at the beginning volunteered to be part of the mission group

B. The Mission Group

Goal II “I will create a mission group to help in the implementation of the project. I will train the group in social justice issues through seminars, bible studies and site visits.

Other guest speakers will be invited to talk on the subject of housing and labor.”

The Group Mission creation took place on Tuesday July 19, 2005 at the site of the Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai. The group constitutes of eleven members from different local churches in the Haitian community. There are from L’eglise De Dieu De La Verite, the Premiere Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai, and the host church, La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El Shaddai. Some of them will drop out for one reason or another and others will come to participate in the study at times. I want to give praise to the Lord for the inner group of seven that have been faithful to the project Tuesday after Tuesday. I must confess that sometimes they are the ones waiting for my arrival to the church. With this group, I started the series of four Bible studies on “Jesus the defender of the poor and the challenger of the existing religious, political establishment of his epoch.” This module is strategy I of goal II.

Strategy I Goal II

- Innovative Bible Study.

As indicated in the proposal one of the endeavors of the project aims at transforming the patron model of the Bible or the Sunday school teacher. One approach was to let each participant teach at least 15 minutes at each session from July 26, 2005 to August 16, 2005. The results were astonishing. They began to see Jesus as a challenger in contrast to the traditional views the people had of Jesus as the gentle Lamb of God. The timid attitude that once characterized the participants in a study or Sunday school

introduce herself and captivated the entire audience for more than thirty minutes because she had some good news for the ministers. The good news was that she could help them get funds from the government. The members of the Association were throwing questions at her on how and when that could happen.

After this encounter with the Haitian Clergy Association, I developed a new approach: the one to one method. On May 15, I visited a church L'eglise Baptiste Des Rachetes, and shared my vision with the pastor who gladly invited me to a meeting in the evening by another association of Haitian pastors, the "Vision Missionnaire Mondiale." The meeting took place at L'eglise Baptiste Du Redempteur and the "World Missionary Vision" is presided over by the pastor of this church. The members, who were about ten, mostly men, happily welcomed me. There were three women in the audience. During twenty to twenty-five minutes, I was able to expose the project to the association and another ten minutes were devoted to questions and answers. The questions mainly from the president expressed the fear of participating in such a movement. He wanted to read about the project to have a better perspective. From this meeting the pastor of L'Eglise Baptiste Des Rachetes invited me to preach in his church on May 29.

I am concluding this section by saying that the "Vision Missionnaire Mondiale" had invited me in their monthly meeting every third Sunday but except for the pastor of L'Eglise Baptiste Des Rachetes and his wife, no one had expressed the immediate willingness to participate in the project.

- “Jesus The Friend of The Poor.”

“Jesus, The Friend of the Poor” was the title of a conference given at La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai on June the 29th at 5 P.M. The conference was not a part of the initial plan. It was a strategy intended to gather members of the community in order for the candidate to speak more about the project. Flyers were distributed a week before and the audience expected was not there for many people chose to attend the last crusade of the Evangelist Billy Graham in Queens the same evening. Twenty people showed up to listen to the biblical facts of Jesus who took a stand for the poor. The historical Jesus took an equivocal stand for the poor by sharing in their helplessness in order to save them.

It is interesting to indicate that in the pre-questionnaires a percentage of 60% of attendants thought that one of the ways the Church could regain people’s confidence at a time when the churches are being deserted was to plant more small churches in the populated urban areas. The other alternatives to this multiple choices question were: by rediscovering a new approach to the historical Jesus, by having more compassion for those who are in need or by lobbying for financial support from the government to help the poor. Only 10% thought that rediscovering a new understanding of Jesus was of prime importance for the church to reach that goal. The remaining 30% was split between having more compassion for the poor and lobbying for financial support from the government. Another pre-question challenged the audience on how the Church can have an active compassion for the poor. The answers were a) by talking to them about Jesus, b) by sharing their fate, c) by helping them get out of their trouble, d) by praying with them.

Again the number one answer given by 75% was a) by talking about Jesus who died for them. Fifteen percent chose c) by helping them get out of their trouble.

It is very surprising to highlight that after the conference, 95 % agreed that the church should rediscover Jesus anew and like him have compassion for the poor. This compassion must be translated in action. It is meaningless to talk to someone about Jesus without sharing his or her burdens. At the end, it became evident that growth had taken place when three people showed interest in playing a role in the group mission.

- The Indifferent Rich Excluded From Abraham's Bosom Lk.16: 19-31.

On May 22nd, la Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai in Brooklyn, church host of the project, had the privilege to discover through the word of God, the type of society that God envisioned for our world. God laid the foundation for this society in the wilderness through his servant Moses right after the Exodus from the land of Egypt. That Sunday I was on the schedule to preach at the morning worship service. The audience constituted of regular members. Thirty- six adults attended.

At the end of the service a deacon's wife told me that the night before she had a vision in which she heard the same message on social justice in the Haitian community and the hymn chosen by the pastor at the end was the same "Haitian, Christian soldiers we all are citizens of Heaven etc.." My first question to her was what is your understanding of all of that? My understanding is "the message is from the Spirit of God," she said. "In the context of this message what does the Spirit say?" I asked. Her response was that "first God loves justice among his children, and justice is not only mere words but action. She continued, "God will punish those who do not practice justice." "I have observed that you keep on referring to the concept of justice what is justice to you?"

I asked her. “Pastor, the message is clear. When we are living in a context where the rich are richer and the poor poorer, when the televisions show all the times the mansions where the rich are living compared to where I am living. I pay so much money for rent and food- is that justice?” “Well! The rich work for their money or at least they invest their money and this is why they become rich”, I answered. “We do the work, they get the money,” she replied. “The system is free. My question to you now is what could the rich man in the parable do differently?” She answered, “He could have helped the poor Lazarus. Pastor, you remember the parable of the good Samaritan.” “I see that you know your Bible, but now how do you intend to live out this knowledge?” I asked. “I will do my best to participate in any movement which purposes to help the poor. I want you to put my name down to be one of the participants of the project” The conversation ended because I had reached my destination. Her husband drove me home that evening after the worship service. This example is one among others. Some people were reluctant at the beginning but as I continued to present the project, 20 to 25% of the community consented to be part of the project.

- The Function of Moses and the Prophets, Lk. 16:19-31.

On May 29th I had the opportunity to respond to an invitation from L’ Eglise Baptiste Des Rachetes located in the Flatlands areas of Brooklyn New York. The Pastor and his wife who had responded positively to my presentation to the Haitian Association earlier on May 15, 2005 invited me. It was their regular Sunday morning service, and 25 adults attended. My focus was to highlight the role of the Church in a society where the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. The same parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus helped our purpose.

Right before the Sunday school, I said to one of the sisters sitting next to me, “I see that you come to church to worship the Lord this morning; what a blessing! But besides that tell me in a few words what would be your role and the church’s in general in our society?” She replied, “You know better than I do.” “But I want to know what is your opinion,” I answered. “The role of the church according to Matthew is to go throughout the world and to preach the gospel so that those who believe will be saved”, she said. “That is a good answer. What does preaching mean to you?” I asked. “To me preaching is to talk to someone about Jesus and his plan of salvation and I am going to give you an example. My sister yesterday went to work and when she came back, she found that someone had broken into to her apartment and almost emptied it out. If I could find this man I would talk to him about salvation.” “Your sister must feel violated and insecure,” I said”. “Of course she is” the sister answered. “What could be the reasons that prompted that person to break into your sister’s house?” I asked. “Maybe he needed money to buy drugs or maybe he was hungry but why he does not find a job?” “This man needs salvation but what other means would prevent him from doing wrong?” I asked her. “I do not know. Why don’t you tell me?” she said. “I will tell you what I think after the service.” I replied.

After the service, I went to her. I said. “Now I am ready to listen to your point.” “The church should be involved in creating a better society in this context by advocating for the poor,” she answered. A deacon who was part of the conversation commented, “I agree pastor but you know it is new and difficult.” “What do you mean by new and difficult, deacon?” I asked. “It is new because the church in our community has never been involved in such activities. It is difficult because poor people like us, who will listen

to our voice?” “You are right, it is difficult but if we organize ourselves by getting together, somebody will listen to our voice. Another skillful way of challenging authority is to do what they are not doing. You know Jesus challenged the authority of his time by doing what they failed to do. It is a form of critique that is in the realm of possibility,” I added. “It was such a pleasure to have you with us today,” they said. “Do not forget that we have a responsibility as the body of Christ to stand for the values that Jesus stood for. The church has a mandate to act now on behalf of those living in poor conditions in our community and those who are being exploited at work,” I concluded. “We will pray for you and the success of the project.” No one volunteered but it was obvious from the conversation with the Deacon and the sister, that a new understanding of the role of the church although difficult has taken place among the people.

- The Double Necessities Lk19: 1-10

There was a need for social justice in Jesus’ time and there is still a need for social justice in our world today. How do we get to that justice is the critical issue that I addressed at La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai, on July 3, 2005. The message’s title was “The Double Necessities.” I preached it during a regular Sunday service in the context of the project.

Luke in this 19th chapter tells the story of Jesus who invites himself to a rich man’s house in Jericho. Luke begins the narrative by saying, “Jesus had to pass that way” (Lk.19: 4). This is the first necessity. In verse 5, Jesus told Zacchaeus “I must stay in your house today” (Lk. 19:5). It is interesting to note that both verbs in both verses **meilw** “have to” in verse 4 and **dei** “must” in verse 5 express necessities in the New Testament Greek. Walter Bauer in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* indicates that

both verbs express a compulsion of some kind, a divine decree⁶². It was a divine decree that Jesus went through that way and by divine command, he must have entered Zacchaeus' house...

The congregation went from confusion at the beginning to being empowered after the message. Before the service no one dared answer the question, how could we achieve social justice bearing in mind the suffering of the poor and the numbness of the rich? Everyone said he would rather wait until after the message. Out of the 35 members who attended the service, 65 % thought that dialogue is the best way to attain social justice and the remaining percentage was questioning whether dialogue could do much for the cause of social justice. The rich will not listen and the process is an endless one.

It is obvious that seeking justice is a long process that requires patience and persuasion. It is the rule of the game. The main objective is to penetrate the rich's numbness with the word of God. It is to create in them compassion

- The Nature of Justice Matt 20:1-16.

On July 17, I went to L'Eglise de Dieu de La Verite located in Crown-Heights areas of Brooklyn, to preach the last message of the "Raising Awareness" aspect of the project. A woman pastor invited me to preach that Sunday morning in the context of the project, which is on social justice in the Haitian community. It was imperative to define what kind of justice I had in mind, since it was obvious that the people were reluctant to get on board. I avoided social philosophy's terminology of comparative or non-comparative justice. Instead, I used the traditional biblical understanding of justice found in the Old Testament, although there are many similarities between the two approaches.

⁶² Walter, Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament Greek and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 501, 172.

changed to confidence as each member participated in the teaching approach. I will report few of the comments on the subject of our study.

Sr.J. E, affirms that Jesus was a man of strength because he would not let the people get hold of him on the many occasions they tried to arrest him. Although he knew they were after him, he always came back to the temple to continue his teaching ministry to the crowd. This strength is also manifested when he casts out from the temple the moneychangers and overturned their tables. He is strong when confronting the Pharisees and we really have to emulate this aspect of Jesus' character in our community.

Br.J. D. thinks that the man from Galilee was in his own unique way a revolutionary. Contrary to the zealots, he preferred to plant the seed that would free the poor from their own oppression and that of others. That seed would grow and transform the life of many. He points out that this is why the teaching ministry was so important to Jesus. He continues that the acceptance of abuse was considered normal but now he sees it quite differently.

Sr.Y.D argues that Jesus was different from the religious authorities of his time, mostly because he loved the poor. He accepted them. He sat down and he ate with them. In our society, people of high rank do not eat with the poor. The politicians come to us when they need our vote at election time. Jesus compels us to break the barrier between rich and poor through love, and the church needs to be the real ambassadors for Christ, she concluded.

Br. J. P. points out that contrary to the Pharisees Jesus took an unequivocal stand for the poor. Our brother indicates that hypocrisy is the main characteristic of our religious leaders as it was in the time of the great Master. He says that our leaders do not

only know the suffering we are going through, but on many occasions they are part of the cause. A better understanding of our situation is a pre-requisite for a ministry that would really reflect that of Jesus.

I have tried to bring here the testimonies of four of the participants but much more can be said on the subject. There is a constant in those testimonies, the teaching ministry of Jesus. One of the benefits of studying the Word together, brother G.C. indicated, “It allows us to seek the fundamental causes of our problems”. One hundred percent of the participants came to realize in their personal experience and that of the community in general that life is a whole. The participants came to understand that there is no dichotomy between spiritual and material life. They are interrelated and this is why the teaching of Jesus and the authorities’ practices clashed so often. All forms of power, religious, political and economic, are connected. “We are not only going to look to politics and economics but also to religion to understand our situation,” stated Sr M.D. “You are right Sister! Religion had played a key role in helping slavery to prosper back home in the time of the French colonization,” said Brother J. D.

I can say that 95 to 100% of the participants have a better understanding of the historical Jesus, his ministry and death on the cross. Pre and post questionnaires were completed during each session. The above testimonies were also used as criteria of evaluation. Awareness has considerably increased.

Goal II Strategy 2

- Seminar on Housing

On August 23 as scheduled, a seminar on housing was given to the participants of the mission group. A sister friend and colleague in the nursing profession who had

previously worked in the Housing Department was the speaker. The seminar's goal aimed at empowering the participants in understanding the court system's mechanism. She explained the different kinds of claims, how to proceed with them, and rent control, and hot line phone numbers were also provided.

At the end of the session, the participants asked many questions and a persistent one was who owns the majority of the buildings in the city or more specifically, in the Flatbush area where the Haitian community is dense. A quick survey in the room among the participants indicated that 85% of their landlords belong to a certain ethnic group in the city. The connection between the city authorities and those property owners were also addressed. I have to indicate that the guest speaker was not prepared to answer those types of questions but she did to the best of her ability give some answers and everyone was satisfied.

The depth of the participant's questions indicates that a clearer picture of structural justice is being formed in their mind. Thirteen persons were present for the seminar and 95% of them demonstrated understanding of its content. Post questionnaires were used to determine the participants' understanding.

Goal II Strategy 2 (cont'd)

- Seminar on Labor

On August 30th the second part of strategy 2, the seminar on labor was held in the context of this project on social justice. A co-worker, union representative of 1199 was supposed to speak on that day. He declined the invitation at the very last moment and the candidate filled the vacancy by exploring the concepts of capital and labor with the participants. One of the key notes of the seminar was the dialogue that should

characterize capital-labor or patron-worker relationship. One cannot exist without the other. I also presented an analysis of the socio-economic situation of the Haitian women in New York: the types of work they are doing and why they are the ones to do them.

As one can imagine, this seminar was very engaging to the members of the mission group because it spoke directly to their reality. Reflecting on one's context is not always an easy task but at the end, it does provide the courage to affront the future with hope.

How can we change the situation? The answers were divided. Thirty five percent of the 12 persons present argued that an organized and assertive community could make the difference and the remaining 65% thought that their children have a better chance given the fact they are getting an education that prepares them for the system. Those data were collected through a post questionnaire at the end of the session. We all know it is a vicious cycle. The present condition of the parents has a lot of impact on the children's future. In either case hope for a change is the determinant factor to maintain life in the community.

Goal II Strategy 3

- Site Visit of *Just Neighbors* in New Jersey.

This component of the project has not taken place yet. The candidate tried unsuccessfully to get in contact with the person who would give the okay for the visit. I spoke with a secretary who had asked the nature of the project. She had promised that someone would call me back but that never happened. As part of their learning process Ambassadors for Christ plan to visit another organization, unknown at this time, that will allow the members to build on their capacity to act on social justice.

C. Organizing and Action for Social Justice: Ambassadors for Christ.

What do we do with the knowledge accumulated during the times of our studies and reflections? Goal III answers the question.

Goal III: "The Mission group and I will create a social justice organization, which will help the Haitian community to stand against social injustice at the work place and the housing system through advocacy."

In the proposal component, I highlighted two possible ways to complete the project. The members of the group mission could go to their respective community and replicate the project, or the members could remain together for the creation of an organization on social justice. The idea of Kombit prevailed, for the group opted to stay together and on September 6 2005, the social justice organization was created under the name of Ambassadors for Christ. The make-up of the seven members of the organization will be addressed later. I will now say that they responded because, first, they believe the community is in need of such an organization and, second, they recognize themselves in the issues. Finally, they felt empowered to help others.

Knowing that a group exists by its mission, one of the first moves of Ambassadors for Christ was to tackle a small case in the housing arena. One member of the mission group, after many attempts, could not get his landlord to fix his bathroom ceiling. There was a leak and the ceiling was falling. The members of Ambassadors for Christ prayed on the case. Ambassadors for Christ used the form of prayer borrowed from Professor George D. McClain in his book *Claiming All Things For God? Prayer, Discernment and Ritual For Social Change*. The prayer consists of first, confessing our sins and imperfections before the infinitude and holiness of God and, second, breathing in

slowly into the self- compassion, love, justice and peace while breathing out oppression, hatred and ignorance. Thereafter the community imagined the falling ceiling and went back to the second part of the prayer. Finally we thank God for victory.⁶⁴ A member brother J. D. volunteered to make the call on behalf of the organization. A message was left for the landlord who could not be reached at the time. The message was as follows:” my name is Brother J. D. and I am a member of Ambassadors for Christ, an organization that helps on social issues in the Haitian community. I would appreciate greatly if you could fix the ceiling in bother J. P.’s bathroom. I understand that he has been complaining to you for a while now.” Brother J. D. used his cell phone to initiate the call. The phone call had convinced the property owner to make the repairs the following day. This was a small victory yet it helped in strengthening the members’ confidence in their ability to serve. The group used to meet every Tuesday from 6 to 8 P.M. We are in recess since the holidays. We plan to resume our activities every other Tuesday by the end of February.

A more complicated case is currently on the table. A member, after more than a year of work, has never received the medical coverage he was supposed to get. During our first intervention with the administration at his place of employment, they claimed not to be aware of the matter and said they would look into it. We have to point out here that before any attempt the group has prayed and unanimously asked pastor,” Why don’t you call the brother’s job ?” The following day I did call the place first by identifying myself as a member of an organization dealing with social justice case. My call was on behalf of Brother Y. P. a member of our organization. The same day the administrator

⁶⁴ George D. McClain, *Claiming All Things For God: Prayer, Discernment, and Ritual For Social Change* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1998), 73.

called the brother in his office and asked him “Did he know about the candidate and the organization and why he did not come to him instead.” The brother did tell the employer that he is a member of Ambassadors for Christ and he is the one who asked the candidate to call for him. After two weeks of silence from the administration, the group has decided to make another move since the administrator had not yet said anything to our brother. We initiated our second intervention. I made another phone call and reminded the patron of our last conversation. I have to point out here that I had to wait a long time before he answered the call. The operator announced him of my call. Our call consisted of asking whether the brother was entitled to the coverage. The patron did concede that the employee was not covered; however, he would rather pay the employee some money on a quarterly basis instead of giving him the coverage. He said that he would take care of the matter. The same week on Friday the brother received \$200 dollars with the indication of medical coverage. He did come and showed the paid stub to the group and the question to him was are you satisfied? “I am thinking,” he said. We have reached to this point so far; however, we are sure to attain the final victory, which is for our brother to get the benefits. The validity of the case has caused the patron in this case to yield to a partial concession. It is our intention with the brother’s permission to continue to press on to the final mark. I have to say that the patron is very kind in a sense that he could have ignored my call because we are not yet a legalized organization. This is what we are going to work on.

As indicated in the proposal the basis of evaluation is not so much on how many cases we have won so far, but in the empowerment of the participants. It is obvious that awareness on social justice issues is more prevalent in the community. My name is being

associated with social justice in the Haitian community. The inner group of seven that constitutes the organization demonstrated through a survey that they see life from a different angle. One hundred percent feel that their life is being transformed. They are more prepared to reflect on their situation and to act upon it. The participants think of life as a whole with a connection between the social, the economic and the political. They have decided to act on social justice but also realize that their action must be collective in order for them to be successful. The church's mission encompasses organization of its members. The participants unanimously decided that it will be part of their ministry to bring to their leader's' attention the issues of social justice in their respective community. One of the issues is for the organization or the church to stand for the community in the school system. These are the criteria I used to evaluate the project's impact in the community.

VI. Ministerial Competencies

A. Goals, Strategies and Evaluation Criteria

- **Theology**

Goal I

Be more skillful and clearer in doing local theology in the context of the Haitian community

Strategy I of Goal I

Read a book on contextual theology and share the content with the Site Team members within the next two months that follow the beginning of the project. April 2005 is the target month.

Evaluation Criteria 1

Survey forms will be given to every team member to evaluate the candidate's aptitude after the presentation. The survey will reflect the candidate's clarity and skill on the matter.

Goal I

Encourage the participants, the Mission Group in this case, to do local theology

Strategy of Goal II

Each member of the Mission Group will be asked to reflect during 5 to 10 minutes on the issues of labor and housing in the community through the light of the Bible.

Evaluation Criteria Goal II

A survey conducted by the candidate at the end of this session will indicate the Group Mission's interest in doing local theology. This survey will take place by the end of May.

- **Leadership**

Goal I

To demonstrate a model of leadership that differs from the common Charismatic model within the Mission Group members, the empowerment of each and everyone.

Strategy of Goal I

Read a Book on empowering leadership and share the content with the Mission Group in a workshop during the month of June 2005.

Evaluation Criteria Goal I

A questionnaire at the end of the workshop will indicate to the candidate the participants' awareness of the different styles of leadership both in the Bible and in the secular world and to what extent they have experienced empowerment.

- **Agent of Transformation**

Goal I

Candidate will be more knowledgeable and assertive in the transformation of the community by the end of this demonstration project in November 2005.

Strategy of Goal I

Survey two books on theory and practice of transformation and report to the Mission Group

Evaluation Criteria

The Mission Group members in a questionnaire will evaluate the candidate performance as related to the clarity and the content of his presentation on the theory and practice of transformation. They will be able to document candidate's growing assertiveness in making transformation possible.

Goal II

Create within the Mission Group members the awareness of being agent of transformation and the engagement in practice.

Strategy 1 of Goal II

Survey the Bible, select some key figures and highlight their roles as agent of transformation of their society, both in the OT and the NT.

Strategy 2 of Goal II

Survey *I've Got The Light Of Freedom* of Charles M. Payne and report to the members of the Mission Group. Emphasis will be on the "grass root" aspect of the African American emancipation movement.

Evaluation Criteria I

A questionnaire at the end of the project will indicate to what extent each member sees himself or herself as an agent of transformation of the community and society in general. This will also be a tool for me to evaluate myself as an agent of transformation in my community.

Evaluation Criteria II

Candidate will observe the extent that each member has increasingly been an agent of transformation.

B. Working on the Competencies

Three areas were to be honed by the candidate during the demonstration of the project. There were theology mainly local theology, leadership and agent of transformation.

- **Theology**

Goal I: “Be more skillful and clearer in doing local theology in the context of the Haitian community”

September 13, Presentation by the candidate on Local Theology

Doing Local Theology / A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity written by Clemens Sedmak was used as a launching board for the presentation. Emphasis was placed on the task of theology, its matrix and who can do theology. More time was devoted to the question; is there is a theology that reflects the Haitian reality here in the Diaspora or in the homeland?

Evaluation I

Twelve out fifteen participants expressed through a survey form the fact that the presentation was very clear and informative. The presentation was clear because the categories used were taken from the Haitian cultural tradition. Consequently, participants were able to relate to the case studies. One hundred percent of the participants picked “very clear” to the question, was the candidate “somewhat clear” “clear,” or “very clear?” The participants’ involvement in the discussion indicates the clarity with which the candidate performed for the presentation. Previously their understanding was that

theology was the domain of an elite and they were amazed that by reflecting on the housing and labor situation of the community they were in fact doing theology.

The understanding of what the subject of local theology entails opens the door to goal II that was to encourage the group mission to do local theology.

Goal II: “Encourage the participants, the Mission Group in this case, to do local theology”

Local theology, to repeat Sedmak Clemens, is a necessity because people are suffering. Doing local theology, I explained to the participants, is hoping that God can change our situation. “To hope is to live” is a well-known saying in the homeland. Doing local theology is actually living. “Pastor, Theology, it seems to me, is our life!” said one of the participants. “And God must be interested in our life,” he concluded. “We are not doing wrong when we are trying to address the issues of housing and labor, The Son of Man, Jesus was involved in all areas of our lives” responded another participant. “This is our endeavor, that through the project the community would reflect on its life through the light of the word of God and act accordingly,” concluded the candidate.

Evaluation II

The goal was met 100% because every participant in his or her own words verbalized understanding and took the engagement from now on to take notice of what is going on around him or her. Paying attention to details is crucial in doing local theology. As indicated earlier, the participants have obtained a new understanding of the concept of theology and more specifically local theology. The final survey has shown growth in the sense that 95% of the participants were able to differentiate local theology from general

theology as a discipline. Eighty five percent were moreover convinced that it is a necessity to do theology for it is a way of survival. Suffering will always be present in our world but theology will also help in facing it and will give hope to the poor.

- **Leadership**

Goal I: “To demonstrate a model of leadership that differs from the common charismatic model within the Group Mission members, the empowerment of each and everyone.”

September 20th, Presentation by the Candidate on Leadership

The first goal for the leadership component was directly connected to my methodology and theology. My belief is that people when empowered can think and act for themselves. This is to me true liberation. Being able to think and act is a sacred right of every human being. To demonstrate leadership two local churches were taken as example. One is led by the type of a one- man show pastor, and the other by a board of deacons who decide for the community. I have to indicate that the problem of leadership is vital in our community. People always look to a leader to do for them.

The project’s aim was to orient the participants toward a new kind of leadership. Traditionally the participants are used to the charismatic model of leadership. Two characters were explored, the one of Moses in the Old Testament and the one of Jesus in the New Testament. It was demonstrated to the participants that empowerment was the cornerstone of this model of leadership. Moses was willing to empower the seventy elders to judge the people in the wilderness. Wherever Jesus went, he always taught the crowd in order to empower them. His ministry was basically a ministry of teaching, sharing, and empowerment. I used the book *How Your Church Family Works / Understandings Congregations as Emotional Systems* by Peter L. Steinke.

growing and really be free. Third, the candidate felt the need to be more assertive in order to be effective in his ministry on social justice. It was imperative that this area be investigated.

To reach that goal the candidate has surveyed *Transformation: It's Theory And Practice In Personal, Political, Historical And Sacred Being* by Manfred Halpern, and I made a report to the group Mission on September 27.

I found the level of necessary assertiveness or self-determination for this transformation during the innovative Bible study on Jesus as a Challenger and through meditative prayer. Meditative prayer was an important part of the project.

Evaluation

Although the language of the Theory and Practice of Transformation was unknown to the participants, the candidate used some vivid examples in the Haitian cultural tradition in order to explain the concept of “archetypes.” There are many in the Haitian culture and those archetypes somehow prevent self-transformation and that of the community in general. The concepts of “emanation,” “incoherence” and transformation were considered. The participants at 95% identified “emanation” as the stage where the community is lingering. In fact, this feeling of sin, shame and guilt always invade the Haitian Protestant any time he or she has to ask some new fundamental questions. Out of 13 participants 90% felt that the candidate did a good job in making them understand the theory and practice of transformation that was new to them. The cases that we have started on housing and labor have given the participants the examples they need to evaluate the candidate's assertiveness in making transformation possible in the community. The labor case we worked on necessitated a period of negotiation

between the administrator and the organization. Since the beginning, the candidate explained to the participants that if we were persistent, we would succeed, and that is what happened. One thing to say here is the key for assertiveness is to overcome the fear of conflict. One of the dividends that I have gained in practicing the theory of Transformation is to come to term with the inevitability of conflict. Confronting the oppressive power like Moses is my endeavor.

Goal II: “Create within the Group Mission members the awareness of being agent of transformation and the engagement in practice.”

Involving the group mission in transforming the community was the second goal of this component of the project. The members’ engagement is of prime importance for a real transformation of our world. First, they have to realize that they are all agents of transformation and the engagement will follow.

Many key figures of the Bible were considered as agents of transformation of their society. I have mentioned the name of Moses, Josuah, Nehemiah, Jesus of Nazareth and lastly the Samaritan woman of John Chapter VI. I demonstrated to the participants that the woman was transformed after facing the “archetypes” of her life through Jesus’ teaching and soon she was ready to transform her community. Emphasis was put also on the fact that we are all salt of the earth. It is a mandate for each and everyone to be an agent of transformation.

To be more at home in showing the possibility of transformation of our society, I surveyed I’ *ve Got The Light Of Freedom* of Charles Payne and I made a report to the participants. I explored with them the type of leadership that led to the emancipation of the African American. The leadership was a bottom up type of leadership and the success

came from everyone men and women that saw themselves as agents of transformation. The movement was to do whatever one could do to attain the common goal. The leitmotiv for the organizers was to go to the people's homes, eat with them, speak their language, associate with them and talk about the main topic, which was voting. The emancipation movement is the example I have encouraged them to emulate.

Evaluation

As indicated the seven members that constitute the organization have expressed their gratitude for being part of the project and they feel empowered to become engaged in transforming the community mostly in the domain of housing and labor. They have expressed it through their willingness to remain together instead of going and starting a similar movement in their respective churches. At the end, the general survey indicated that 100% of the participants agreed that Ambassadors for Christ remains as a body. In regards to question' about the spiritual and educational benefits acquired during the project the results were very encouraging. One hundred percent of the participants indicated they would not hesitate to join a similar project in the future. When asked what was the most interesting part of the project, eighty percent showed their preference for the Bible study component on "Jesus the Challenger of the authorities of his epoch." This is, as indicated in the proposal, my self-evaluation to the empowerment of the participants.

One direct and immediate criterion of evaluation of each member as being increasingly an agent of transformation is the readiness of each one to join the discussion and to share his or her opinions. At the beginning of the project, I was facing people who did not have a voice because they thought that their views might not matter. Now

everyone feels confident to contribute in a given subject. The candidate could also validate this increasing awareness on behalf of some participants, who Tuesday after Tuesday would try to bring someone with them to the meetings. I am sure they will continue the process of sharing their experience both inside and outside of the organization. Two members of the group have asked me if I could periodically come to their church and study with the community. They did tell me straight-forward that they would convince their pastor to that effect. They are in search of change and they know that only the truth can really liberate.

I have grown considerably from the demonstration of this project on social justice. First, I have learned that there is hope for transformation in our society. I want to mention here the fear I had to overcome at the beginning. I felt the call to work in the field of social justice but I was scared, knowing the community's mentality on the concept of social justice. After the night of my presentation to the Haitian Clergy, I spent more than two hours with my pastor in his car discussing their response. The failure was obvious. The Haitian Clergy did not want to hear about social Justice. The solution was to go out and to present my case to individuals, those with good will.

The paradigm that helped me the most is the one of John 15. "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). A ministry of friendship or a "kombit" theology has helped in realizing the project. The reciprocal sharing of suffering and concerns between members of the community was indispensable for developing the bond of unity and consequently the very cause of success. The members who constituted the group mission

and the organization are common and poor people who could identify with my message on social justice in contrast to the Haitian Clergy.

The promotion of leadership or empowerment is an immediate implication of this ministry of “friendship” or “Kombit.” This type of approach will always direct my ministry. I have come to accept that working with the people is more beneficial than working for them. The practice of such an approach infuses in the participant a sense of responsibility and involvement. This practice also gives a break to the minister, for the minister needs to be ministered to at times. It was such a privilege for me to sit down and listen to participants making their presentations. Friendship is to let oneself be transformed by another.

I have learned and verified that people in power will listen and will yield to the cause of social justice if people are organized and are willing to go through the process of challenging them.

VII. What I have learned and Where we go from there

The answer to the question requires that one look back at the initial point of departure to appreciate the journey for a better self-orientation. These retrospective enterprises led me to read over the section *My Journey at NYTS* from my Credo when I exited the Master of Divinity Program. One constant can be read between the lines: the thirst for social justice, the longing for a better world. This intense inner desire for justice has led me to the Doctor of Ministry Program for a better preparation in the field of social justice. I completed the demonstration project, and it is time for me to count the blessings. The time is due now for a self-evaluation

It is doubtless that the program's academic curriculum fits well one seeking to further his or her study. I am grateful to the institution for that aspect of the program. I have been exposed to such a knowledgeable faculty. The area, on which I want to elaborate however, is the practical dimension of the program or the demonstration of the project.

In my challenge statement I have identified a lack in the ministry to the Haitian community of East Flatbush. The ministry on social justice was lacking and my calling for the cause pushed me on that direction. How would I do it was a puzzle, given the complexity of the matter in the Haitian community. One thing I had realized was that I needed to grow myself to begin with. This project has allowed me to gain growth in many aspects for a ministry on social justice.

The first area I will mention here is the one of assertiveness. This self-determination for the cause of social justice has been found not only in the practice of spiritual discipline but also in the development of Kombit theology. In fact the empowerment of one another is one of the immediate dividends of our approach. Through Kombit theology I have come to term as a member of the community that I am responsible and the sense of this responsibility instills to my innermost being the gut to act on behalf of my community. The historical Jesus has set the example. I have gained a new and a better understanding of Jesus, his involvement in his community and ultimately his death on the cross. The historical Jesus invites everyone in the community to follow his footstep

The second aspect I want to mention is the practice of transformation. The practice of transformation requires that one understand the dynamism at play in him or her, before attempting the transformation of the environment. I am a product of the environment that I am called to change. That reciprocal interaction between the self as agent of transformation and my environment was critical. Through a communal study and the inevitable fellowship with the members, more light was shed on the underlying factors that prevent my community to grow. The project provided for a matrix allowing me to see the self and the community in large. Through research the community's archetypes were unveiled to me. This is a very important tool for my ministry on social justice. As I am more aware of the community's hindrances, I become freer to act as an agent of transformation does.

The third area I want to consider at this time is my leadership. The model of leadership I believe in is the one that fosters the community's control of its destiny. One

thing I have learned is that the model is a process. For people to reach self-determination they need to be free from all kinds of alienation. People need to be educated. Knowing the truth is sine qua non for liberation. Like indicated somewhere in the ministerial component my paradigm of leadership is the one of “friendship” in which I share with the members all I know to empower them. The sharing here encompasses the receiving also from the members. Listening is one skill more I have learned to develop in the context of this project. One of the participants suggested that I kept the meeting on Tuesday. I was trying to change the meeting schedule because a pastor wanted to have a meeting on Tuesdays in order to prevent his members to come to the project’s meeting. “Do not yield to his maneuver he will not succeed,” one of the members said. In fact the meeting had never taken place until now. This model of leadership leads me to consider the fourth area of my self-evaluation, the teaching aspect

One of the goals I had set during the preliminary research was to challenge the ways the Bible study and the Sunday school are conducted in our churches. The teacher is considered to be a patron who knows it all. The project has allowed me the experimentation of the class-participation approach in which everyone in the community has a voice. It was a success to the point that the participants want me to continue the Bible study with them. I believe this is due, not that I have taught them some new or different doctrines, but to the approach. It was such a good and pleasant experience. The approach is not new to me because I have read *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, but I have never implemented it until now.

The final aspect worth mentioning here is spirituality. The growth cannot be measured. It was such a joy for being with brothers and sisters every Tuesday for the

length of the project. Experiencing God's presence through our difficulties was so uplifting. I have come to realize that God is in everything and encompasses everything. There is in fact one life. As a community we tend to dissociate the material and the spiritual life. I come to understand that the eternal life we are longing after is at the junction of this material life on earth. Both lives are in fact one. Living a responsible life in the community is what really matters to God and opens the door to eternal life. This is what had pushed me and continues to motivate me to be a worker of justice. This is what inspires me to work for unity and peace in the community. Spiritually I have grown and I become stronger for the cause of justice. "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity...there the Lord ordained his blessings, life forevermore" (Ps.133: 1-3).

Doubtless this unity will continue to hold the members of Ambassadors for Christ together. My hope is that they will grow and serve the community. For sure I will continue to devote myself for the cause of justice with the members of the organization. Knowing the community's reluctance for the cause of justice we need to establish with it the indispensable bond of trust. The organization's next step will consist of making itself known to the community. So far we have been working with the people inside the organization. We want to expand by legalizing the organization status, creating a website, and by having some spots on the Christian radio stations. These are factors that will allow Ambassadors for Christ to be a part of the community's life.

I will always continue to intervene and serve the cause of justice. However, my desire is to go back to my native country in order to impart the knowledge that I have gained through my journey at NYTS. My yearning is to open a Bible institute so that I

could have an impact on a generation or so. I want to make a difference by sharing my views and beliefs with a new generation that may transform the Haitian society. If there is going to be a change, it must come from the Church. I am not a pioneer in that regard. Many are working toward a real liberation of my people, but I want to make my contribution. I conclude with this command of Apostle Paul to Timothy: "What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well" (II Tim 2:2). This is our hope, to entrust to others what we have learned so that they can teach others as well.

Epilogue

Towards a Real Transformation in the Haitian Community

In the spring 2005, La Deuxieme Eglise Baptiste El-Shaddai, through the demonstration of Social Justice and Haitian Protestantism in the Community of East Flatbush Brooklyn New York, has inaugurated a new beginning in the history of Haitian Protestantism. For the first time an organization Ambassadors for Christ was born from this project in order to fight social injustice in the community. Ambassadors for Christ has began to make an history in Haitian Protestantism, for as many people know it is taboo for the Haitian Protestant to get involved in social justice issues. It is thought that Protestants should not be part of social justice activities because they are heavenly citizens. Suffering is the will of God; it is a preparation for the life to come. Many archetypes invade the Haitian cultural background. For instances God created some ethnic groups to be rich and other to be poor. There is a noticeable difference between the fingers of one's hand. Some are stronger than other is. From this view of God, there originated a theology of a partial God or at least a God who does not have the control of life mostly on this earth. There is a common saying in the homeland that goes "Bon Die Konin bay y pa konin separe," "God Gives but he does not know how to share." The idea here is that God gives abundantly to some and other are in poverty. God is partial to those who have.

The immediate implications of this theology are passivity and despair. It is a fact that this view of a partial God indicates the frustration of a nation born from slavery and trapped constantly in struggle for survival. "For so many years they have been sucking the sorrow milk from the left breast, it is about time that God give them a chance to suck

the sweet milk from the right breast,” a common Haitian song says. Many people think that, it is needless to fight because God has already set their fate. Hopelessness characterizes this way of thinking. Those who choose the path of resistance will fight on their own, with their own means, because the God of the Bible is not much concerned, they argue.

From this perspective of a God who is interested only on the salvation of the soul derives also a schism in the Haitian mind. A separation of the spiritual and the secular life is established in the Haitian Protestant mentality. One time I listened to a preacher saying the promise of shalom was made only to Israel as nation, not to every nation. Therefore it belongs to other people to find their own way and means to wealth. The Haitian mind generally is not quite sure that God really wants one's happiness in this life. Happiness will be found across the bridge in the life to come.

People usually say that every Haitian practices the Vodou. The assertion is not right but it does convey the idea that most Haitians whether a Christian or not will always consult the gods or the “loas” “spirits” when difficulties arise. Because he or she does not believe that the God of the Bible or Jesus can really save. Salvation here has to see with the material difficulties not the soul. Such a belief and practice foster idolatry. With one hand one serves the God of the Bible, with the other hand, the “loas” or “spirits” of Vodou. Religious syncretism is the association of Catholic religious beliefs with the Vodou. The project aim was actually to develop a theology that will allow one to see God's Oneness, his or her justice and love. This project on social justice tries to give hope to the participants knowing that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is a God of love and justice. He is actually with every believer fighting for his or her salvation. I have to

say that the above theology is quite different from the theological view of a Protestant believer but again one will always find the traces of those common beliefs and practices among Protestants.

Now before I proceed further there is a question that is of prime importance. The question is can it be defined a theology typically Haitian mostly in the Protestant world? If according to Christian theology, theology is the reflection on God through one's reality; it is obvious that generally the Haitian Protestant is still doing a second hand theology. A theology that is not local an imported theology is the fate of the Haitian Protestant. There is still no differentiation between the foreign evangelizing mother churches and the Haitian indigenous daughter churches, according to many thinkers in the theological arena. Differentiation here encompasses not only the concept of identity but also the ability of the daughter cell church to replicate itself. The daughter cell churches are weak before the surrounding environment or the concept of community is neglected. Haitian Protestantism always emphasizes the personal aspect of salvation and overlooks its communal aspect. This explains why is that after more than a century of existence we cannot talk of a real transformation in our society whether in Diaspora or the homeland. Forty percent of the Haitian population is Protestant, and claim Jesus as their savior.

Is there a difference between the Jesus of the Gospel and the one we know in the Haitian community? The Jesus we serve seems to save partially or at least he is not so much concerned with the salvation of the poor. He is a foreigner and he cannot do much for our reality as poor and Black Country. Poverty or oppression is part of the game. Consequently, the transformative power of the church as the body of Christ is

questionable after so many years of conversion to Christianity. Haiti is the poorest nation in the hemisphere some argue. One time I attended a meeting in which the new Director of the northeastern district, an American stated that he was not there to change the situation of the Haitian churches in the northeastern area of the Christian Missionary Alliance. The Haitian churches were not doing well financially and the CMA had to dismantle the Haitian district to make it an association to the Northeastern American district. He is a foreigner to the Haitian suffering and he could not be part of helping the Haitian churches to get out of trouble. It is understood why Jesus could not save the human race without taking a human form because he would be foreign to our misery and suffering. According to the Old Testament practices it was mandatory that one be part of the family to redeem another member in trouble. A Jesus foreign to the Haitian cause cannot really save us or at least we are not comfortable to go to a Jesus who is not a brother or a friend. It must be a relationship between the redeemed and the redeemer. In Exodus chapter 3 God says to Moses "I am the God of your father." We must be related to God. It is sine qua non therefore that Jesus be reborn on the Haitian soil. It is an imperative that a new conception of Jesus of Nazareth, a new Incarnation be made in the Haitian Protestant mind. Seeing Jesus anew, as a brother, was an indispensable component of this project on social justice.

In *Christ Outside the Gate*, Orlando Costas highlights two critical questions that the Christian should always ask. The first, does the Jesus he or she experiencing conforms to the Jesus of the New Testament narratives? The second, what is the "transforming reality" of a follower of Jesus? Because it is from Jesus' character to change and transform one's reality. Jesus not only announces the kingdom of God but he

is himself the kingdom, a kingdom of peace, justice, joy and love. Wherever Jesus is at work there must be transformation. As a community we had during the demonstration of this project to face those two questions.

Using *Transformation: Its Theory and Practice in Personal, Political, Historical And Sacred Being* by Manfred Halpen, the participants were able to make the translation from the Jesus they were serving to the real Jesus, the Jesus who is conform to the one of the New Testament. Reflecting on Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman of John chapter IV, the participants as a body come to understand that God is Spirit, he or she is neither from Jerusalem or Samaria, one does not need to go to Jerusalem or Samaria to experience his or her presence. One needs to worship God in truth and in spirit. In fact the wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes (Jn 3:8). God is Spirit, he or she does not have a location. God can be found anywhere at any time of history. He can be related to anyone. Paul says he is the Father of all families on earth and heaven (Eph 3:14).

The time or space does not limit the resurrected Jesus. The resurrected Jesus appeared to many disciples in many places and occasions. He was not limited to a particular physical shape or color. Although he carried the marks of the nails on his hands, the disciples could not recognize him as the Jesus they knew before the resurrection. He can be at time a stranger or a familiar as he chooses to. The disciples on the road of Emmaus did not know who he was until he revealed the self to them. This communal reflection has allowed the participants to midwife the rebirth of a Haitian Jesus.

As Haitian, Jesus must know our experience as a people and he must be participating with us in our struggle. A Jesus in conformity with the Jesus of the gospels must speak our language the Creole and understand our suffering. He must understand the situation of countless Haitians who have never had a chance to work in their entire life. Jesus born on the land of Haiti must feel and hear the cries of the fatherless Haitian children. He must have compassion for the majority of mothers who cannot afford to feed their loved ones. The Haitian Jesus knows the Haitian complex. He is an all-knowing Jesus. He knows personal and communal history because he is the maker of history. This is the primary handicap of the body of Christ in the Haitian community, it seems not to know its reality, it negates its experience and transformation is far from being reached. The rebirth of the Haitian Jesus has helped in bridging the gap of race and color in the Haitian mind. In fact the later always think that the White race was created by God and the Black by some other being. The Haitian Jesus overcomes the problem of race, color or class.

As it is true for any giving-birth experience it takes the courage of the mother and the skill and patience of the midwife for a baby to come out. The Haitian Clergy Association in Brooklyn does not have the courage to labor for the birth of a Jesus who took a stand for the poor. The association cannot imagine a Jesus who has chosen to be born in one of the poor and populated area in Haiti. For so many years they have been dealing with a Jesus who is foreign to them yet they would rather stay with him any way. The association is not ready to reflect on those archetypes that impede the community spiritual growth. To change in one's way of thinking or seeing God is always a difficult matter, but Ambassadors for Christ will use the necessary skill and patience for this new

perspective of Jesus be spread in the community and in the homeland. Our hope is that every brother and sister will come to terms with the God Father and Savior revealed in the life, ministry and death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As for the Samaritan woman, this new revelation of God or the Haitian Jesus in our context has allowed the participants of the project to develop a new theology and a new praxis. Kombit theology is the seeking of God through Haitian categories, histories and cultures. Kombit theology is seeing together the Godhead activity in our history for a complete liberation of our suffering community. Kombit theology has allowed the participants to identify Jesus as the first Haitian working from within and out to liberate his fellow Haitian brothers and sisters in bondage of sin and oppression. The participants have a better understanding of the Angel of the Lord's activity in Judges Chapter 6. The participants have identified the Angel of the Lord as the pre-incarnated Jesus of the Old Testament who encourages the young Gideon to go and fight the Madianites and he the Lord will be with him. Jesus' name Emanuel now makes more sense to the participants, who understand that God is with us to fight all kinds of oppression, political, social and economic (Judg 6:11-16).

The Haitian Jesus highlights to us the importance of community. He is always in agreement with the Godhead, the Father, and the Son, as we know him and the Spirit. To the Jews questioning a miracle granted on a Sabbath day he answered, "My Father is still working and I also am working" (Jn 5:17). Working with the Father for the common goal of salvation of the human community is his priority. His promise also is to be with the community wherever the members would gather in his name (Mtt 18: 19-20). The participants have found many interesting implications for its survival from these insights.

Among them, there is the involvement of everyone in the community's life and the encouragement to work together for its well being. "Walking united," a phrase from the Haitian national hymn, makes now more sense to the participants and they are able to see God's activity in its penning. Our society and our churches are so fragmented and divided. It is an imperative for the body of Christ to be united in order to accomplish the Master's mission of liberation or salvation. The demonstration of this project on social justice had allowed two different denominations, La Deuxieme Eglise Baptist El-Shaddai and L'Eglise De Dieu De La Verite, to sit together, and the organization born from this encounter is made up of members of these denominations. The political being of Transformation is also asserted here and the spirit of division is overcome. It is of prime importance that one realizes that the Godhead is united and the participants have learned that whatever the individual cannot accomplish on his or her own, together a community can.

Another point worth mentioning here is that if the Spirit of Jesus has inspired the redaction of the national hymn, this Jesus must be interested in our history. He must be involved as an active and invisible member of the Haitian community. It was the same Spirit of freedom, which led the indigenous army to victory over the well-trained French army in the year 1804. There is no separation in life for God encompasses all. Paul states "In Jesus all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers- all things have been created through him and by him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17). This rediscovery of the truth makes it possible for the members to comprehend the concept of the indivisibility of salvation or life in general. It is

interesting to indicate that for Luke the concept of salvation translates any experience of deliverance. The Greek verb "to save" is used whether the salvation is from demonic power, the healing from a disease or the salvation of the soul.

It is needless to say that empowerment has taken place among the participants. Knowing that Jesus is among them, working with them for their liberation. It is energizing for them to know that Jesus is concerned with salvation in its entirety and the real Jesus has conquered death and the evil powers of this world. Jesus' appearance to Mary of Magdala on the day of resurrection infuses the confused and discouraged disciple with the strength and joy to go back and announce the good news to the other members of the community. After the oral presentation, a colleague with whom I commuted back to Brooklyn said to me "Pastor Djo, what I would like to see is that for you not to stay at one place but to go and spread Kombit theology." After my hospitalization a friend of mine expressed the concern that the group had not been meeting and we cannot afford to let the movement down. We have to continue is the leitmotiv. My question to everyone of them is, what about your participation? "A conscious and active participation in the struggle," to repeat Gustavo Gutierrez, is for me the litmus test of a real transformation of the participants. It is not enough to know the truth; the truth must set one free.

It is obvious that growth has taken place among the participants but it is too early at this point of time to talk about a real transformation in the community. Through surveys, questionnaires and testimonies, the participants have expressed the difference from the way they used to see God and the way they actually see and understand him or she in our history. Brother J. D. Said to me once in a conversation over the phone:

“Pastor Djo I was in such a darkness. I see God as bringing justice in the community through his word. We have to work with God to that effect. Now I see and understand what Paul means by “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of those who believe”(Rom 1:16). “What do you mean, “ I replied. “I mean by that the gospel can really save it depends on the way you approach it, it depends on the way you understand and believe God. “What is salvation for you?” I asked. “For me, salvation is deliverance from any problem I may have and with God’s help I intend to work with this salvation.” He answered. He finished by saying. “ I am making disciple because I was talking to a friend of mine and he is interested to participate in the studies.” Members of the organization Ambassadors for Christ are ready to work and to participate in the spreading of the good news. They are ready to work in helping those suffering from social injustice. They were involved step-by-step in the cases we have worked on. They have given ideas; they have taken the initiative to convince their pastor to invite me in their church to preach and to study with them. Those are signs of transformation because the rate of participation in the Bible studies is very low in our churches. People usually will come to prayer meeting or worship service but they are not too interested in Bible study. It seems like the studies do not meet their need. The critical question here: will the fruits keep the promise of the flowers?

In Mark Chapter IV, Jesus gives the parable of the sower who sows the word in different type of soils. There are those who are very happy in receiving the word, but who are not really transformed by it. There are also good soils, they hear the word, they accept it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundred fold (Mk 4:20). On that note I cannot predict the when for a real transformation of the Haitian community but one thing

is sure, there is a new dawn at the horizon. There is a new understanding of God, and a new vision of his or her activity in our community. The urgent need now is for the CO-workers of Christ to continue the sowing by standing against social injustice and by teaching to others the love and compassion of Jesus. The real transformation will be manifest when adults and young male or female, like in a kombit, will gather consciously to work for the well being of this community.

IX. APPENDICES

Appendix A

Excerpt from: "The Function of Moses and the Prophets"(Lk 16: 29), presented on May 29, 2005.

"They have Moses and the Prophets, they should listen to them" (Lk16: 29).

A harsh response from father Abraham to the rich man who thought he could have used the same practice of using the poor to reach his goal. In his torment, the rich wanted Lazarrus to serve him and moreover he wanted him to go and talk to his brothers to prevent them from coming to Sheol. "They have Moses and the Prophets, they should listen to them."

It is common knowledge that the name of Moses is related to a lot of functions. He was a man of God, legislator, leader, organizer, prophet and others. In fact through him God has initiated the type of society that he wants to establish on earth, a society of justice according to the Hebrew Bible. The history of the Old Testament has shown that, this goal of a righteous God however, had never concretized in Israel's life in the promise land. Throughout the history of Israel's national life, God had sent his prophets to remind the people as a chosen nation, they have to reflect the character of God. Israel should also remember as a people, they were also under oppression in the land of Egypt. The covenant's life has always been a dream for the people in Israel and Prophets such Hosea, Amos and Jeremiah always refer to the period where the people experienced God in the wilderness. The prophetic imagination was that ability of the prophet to take back the people's mind to that golden age of Israel as a community, a community where justice prevailed. Each family in that Exodus' community had to take the quantity of manna that was necessary for its daily consumption. In fact if one took more than he or she was supposed to, the surplus was spoiled.

In the parable Luke highlights the fate of the indifferent rich, but the role of the church, in a society where the rich become richer and the poor poorer, is unmistakable. "They have Moses and the prophets, they should listen to them." It is an imperative for the Church to play an active role in the transformation of our society. It is our historical opportunity as the body of Christ; to do whatever that is in our power to change the conditions of the poor. One of the means, we have as the Church, is the word of God. The word of God compels the rich to be generous. Apostle Paul's instruction to Timothy is to "Command the rich of this present age not to be haughty, or to set their hope on the uncertainty of riches but on God. The rich have to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share (I Tim 6:17-18).

Appendix B

Excerpt from the Nature of Justice (Matt 20:1-16), presented on July 17, 2005.

Jesus highlights two kinds of justice in this parable. Justice that consists of giving to one what is due to him or her and the one that is embedded in generosity? At the end of a day of labor, a landowner ordained that the laborers get paid the same amount of money in spite of the difference of time of hiring. Of course those who worked for the entire day were not happy, but the landowner replied to one of them: "I am not doing you no wrong, did you agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belong to you and go; I chose to give to this last the same I give to you. Are you envious because I am generous"(Matt 20:13-15). The Greek adjective **agaoj** makes here the difference and explains the landowner's concern. He is generous. All day long he went to the marketplace to hire laborers. Verse 5 in the parable tells us that about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day"? They said to him, "because no one has hired us." No one has hired them because may be, they did not have a work permit, may be they did not speak Aramaic properly, may be they did not have the proper training. No one has hired them because, they were may be minorities, or may be the color of their skin has prevented them from being hired. In any event the landowner said to them, "you also go to my vineyard"(Matt 20:7). This is justice-compassion, the **haqdAc4**. This is what social philosophy calls material principle of justice. The criteria for justice is not a generalized standard for everyone, but justice is distributed by a careful analysis of everyone situation.

This is really the type of justice we are longing after in the Haitian community. This justice compels us as the landowner to go constantly after the unemployed laborers to help them. This is the type of justice that the kingdom of God entails.

Appendix C

Overall Survey

1. In what sense the Church of our time cannot be fully identified to the historical Jesus?
2. In what ways Jesus a challenge for the authorities of his time
3. Say in few sentences the sense to you of following Jesus.
4. What can the Church do to regain people's trust?
 - a. rediscover a new perspective of Jesus of Nazareth
 - b. have an active compassion for the poor
 - c. build more churches
 - d. get more funds from government.
5. What would Jesus do for the many homeless in our cities today?
 - a. He would give them a place to stay.
 - b. He would teach them on the causes of their suffering
 - c. He would comfort them
 - d. He would pay no mind
 - e. Explain your choice(s)
6. Define on your own word what is theology?
7. What are the differences between local and general theology?
8. How can we do local theology?
9. What are the benefits of doing local theology?
10. When doing local theology one should not involve politic in it? Explain
11. What is to you the sense of "You are the salt of the earth"?
12. Should you play a role in transforming our society? How?
13. Based on our study on theory and practice of transformation what is the meaning of archetype and name a few in the Haitian culture?
14. Why is that our society needs to be changed? Explain.
15. Explain the concept of social justice?
16. How can we reach justice in our society today?

- a. by waiting on our political leader
 - b. by taking our own defense
 - c. by organizing the community
 - d. by praying to God
17. What is for you leadership?
18. From the two models we have studied which one you like the most? Why?
19. Being empowered for the cause of social justice is what?
20. Compare to when we just started the project do you feel
- a. empowered
 - b. somehow empowered
 - c. not sure
21. What was for you the most interesting component of the project?
- a. the seminar on labor and housing
 - b. the innovative Bible study
 - c. the presentation on local theology
 - d. the Presentation on theory and practice of transformation
 - e. the presentation on leadership
 - f. the cases we have worked on
22. What are the differences between secular and spiritual lives? If there is none, why?
23. What are your future plans for ministry?
24. Do you see yourself working for the cause of social justice
- a. definitely
 - b. not sure
 - c. wait and see
25. Would you mind sharing the knowledge you have acquired during the project?
26. Would you mind to join a similar project? Explain your answer.

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